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EUGENIA:

AN EPISODE.

BY

WILLIAM MONEY HARDINGE,

AUTHOR OF "CLIFFORD GRAY."

"Glory to God—to God," he saith,
"Knowledge by suffering entereth,
And Life is perfected—in Death!"
E. B. BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE.

1883.

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“And lives and works, what are they all at last, except the roads to
faith and death?”

—WALT WHITMAN.

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McLaughlin 29 Jan. 5-3

Dedication.

—o—

TO A ROOM IN — HOUSE, HANTS.

Sunday Morning.

HERE, in this old dear room, I must needs begin my book, for all sorts of reasons, easier thought of than expressed, but hard to think out too. For here much of learning, if not much of incident, has happened to me; till I think there is no place in all the world quite so beautiful or quite so understanding or quite so tender. In this room I have been very near death, in this room I have known the fullest moments of life: in this room I have felt closest to God and best loved my neighbours. Is not that much? I think that it is all.

Gen. Rev. Ray 29 Jan. 5-3

It is a beautiful room, hung with faint-coloured, flower-painted silk, set, in large panels, upon dark blue velvet. Its tables are fair with old church lace, its furniture inlaid. It has a wardrobe lacquered with quaint Scripture scenes, each of which I could draw blindfold. So far, so good.

And it has a square window which lets me in the September day—it is always September here—and it frames me glades and lawns, and the gravel court ordered for tennis, and a few large trees of elm and fir, finely grouped to point the landscape. And, beyond these, the near river—winding seawards—with the houseboats moored in it and a little yacht : and then the Hard, and, beyond again, Southampton water, calm and cool like a silver shield, and further, woods, and to leftward, the distant Island. And it lets me hear the half-hushed song of morning birds and the happy voices of the children. So far, so better.

And the room is full of memories — a chamber of live dreams : they breathe in from the gardens as the soft wind stirs the curtain ; within-doors they start and waken as the sunlight travels towards the table where I write. O dividing years ! you vanish ; and it is as if a vision passed me by ;—the form of one like whom none walks the earth, for tenderness or beauty, now ; like whom they walk in Heaven. . . . Ah me ! So far, so best.

September 25, 1881.



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Book the First.



LOVE, THE DREAM.

“They have drawn too near the fire of life, like gnats,
And flare up bodily, wings and all, what then?
Who’s sorry for a gnat—or girl?”—

—“*Aurora Leigh.*”

E U G E N I A.



CHAPTER I.

DESCRIPTIVE.

THE Tomlinsons had not been long established at Ashbank, but the place itself was at least as good a patent of nobility as a new coronet. A fine old house—its centre Elizabethan but flanked, in the style, really more modern, which we call distinctively *old fashioned*, with wings of large square rooms built rather for comfort than for show—it was set amid surroundings, than which there are, perhaps, none choicer in the length and breadth of England, on the broken coast of Hampshire, just where a river widens to

the sea. Old world timber, old world lawns, opportunities for all sport, good shooting, good fishing, good river and sea faring, a varied neighbourhood, and comparative accessibility combined to render the place an ideal one for the agent's advertisement, and to commend it to the wealthy merchant, first, as an investment, and then, when his views expanded to the lifted horizon of his fortune, as a summer home. Mrs. Tomlinson's horizon lifted too: she was popular in a negative sort of fashion, and—at first, of course, with a negative sort of people—her house was filled.

But it was Ashbank that secured Mrs. Tomlinson's popularity, not Mrs. Tomlinson's popularity that filled Ashbank. She was rather the sufficient housekeeper than the hostess of her guests, and they could visit her beautiful home without being inconvenienced by relatives or children, for Mrs.

Tomlinson's relatives, though not, like Mr. Tomlinson's, "*impossible*," were of the order termed "*not quite presentable*," and she was childless. She and her husband were just an old and very hospitable pair, who liked to see young faces about them and to have everything (specially the young faces) of the best : a little given to display perhaps, a little given to patronage, but, in the world's verdict, kindness itself.

It was August, and they had but lately returned to Ashbank. There had been a few days sacrificed to such of the "unpresentable" relatives as were good-natured enough to meet the "impossible;" but both were gone now, after their week of luxurious change, and had returned to their haunts, less grateful, indeed, than envious. For the moment the Tomlinsons were alone, husband and wife, and they were not sorry. For there is always a behind-the-scenes ; and even with these most orderly

and commonplace of people, there were times when they wanted to be quite free—to speak to each other with something of the old manner, to talk of the house and the guests, as of a wonderful scene and pageant that was hardly theirs, to air doubts about the impressions their new friends should receive. At these times they retrenched their private expenditure as if their income were a tenth of what it had become, and were rather shy of their too numerous servants.

So they sat together a good deal in Mrs. Tomlinson's morning room—a sunny den upstairs, some forty feet long,—whither every kind of stray relic had drifted, and of which Mrs. Tomlinson had felt rather ashamed when her first great lady had expressed a wish to be shown her “own little holy of holies.” It was very large, and very bright, and very luxurious, but it was not for the public eye. It had a great many old photographs upon

its walls and old daguerreotypes upon its tables, of middle-class looking ladies, in large crinolines and lace collars, and middle-class looking gentlemen, in ample coats, with books or letters in their hands—both sexes managing to convey a general impression that they were either dead or shelved beyond recall—and it had volumes lying about, with rather tell-tale inscriptions on their fly-leaves. There was that handy book, for instance, which Mrs. Tomlinson read out of every day, and looked into as a resource in every need—the book that, in her graphic speech, she said she “never could *do* without;” though, as Mrs. Tomlinson had nothing in the world to do, it was doubtful whether she would be the worse for losing it. Into this book, of course, the great lady had forthwith dived, sifting its treasure, for it was a work of “general information,” and Mrs. Tomlinson had never quite got over the feeling that the great lady had

caught sight of that vague autograph upon its page, which set forth how it had been given—" *To E. J. Tomlinson—that is to be—upon her marriage, from her dear friend (and cousin), Clara Fubber, in remembrance of so many happy days together, on Clapham Common. With every good wish, and hoping it may prove useful.*" A slight involuntary sneer on the great lady's face—which was a kind face after all, though the blue blood in it was too blue not to show cold and acid now and then—had induced Mrs. Tomlinson to lock up this literary mentor for a while ; but it had found its way down from her miscellaneous shelves again, and was before her on her special table now.

But upon this eventful August afternoon, though Mrs. Tomlinson was sitting at her table, which was in the window, she was not engrossed in the pages of "Inquire Within," having latterly outgrown, perhaps, the advice

of her domestic encyclopædia. She was talking to her husband—with her back to him, but that did not prevent her knowing that he was really asleep. She could make him answer her in alternated monosyllables; these she found sufficient, for the nonce, to carry on the thread of her conversation, which was always one-sided enough. And so she let him answer automatically, and slumber on.

“The Buxtons will be here first,” she said, “three of them?”

“Yes.”

“I should not be surprised if they brought Anne with them.”

“No.”

“The Shortlands’ train arrives later—a cross journey.”

“Yes.”

“There will be no difficulty about meeting them, will there?”

“No.”

"The men can shift for themselves, Mr. Vane and his friend at all events. There are always plenty of flies at Farlingham."

"Yes."

"Or—we must send the victoria for Sir Edmund, you know : the wagonette is no good to him."—

"No."

—"Then," (with the air of one who has triumphed in argument) "*it* can meet *them*."

"Yes."

"If we want any more gentlemen" (Mrs. Tomlinson always said "gentlemen"), "there will be no difficulty in getting some of the officers over from Portsmouth by-and-by."

"No."

"What girls have we?"

Mrs. Tomlinson was tired of automatic answers, that was all. She knew perfectly well—and Mr. Tomlinson did not know—what girls she had asked, and where they were to

sleep, and where their maids were to be put; but the question had its effect. It knocked her recreant husband into a moment's wakefulness. He sat bolt upright and pulled a handkerchief down from over his bald head, as if to aid himself with light and air. "Dear me!" he said with some discomfort in his tone, "why there's May Buxton—May Buxton there is," he repeated, and his tone became more comfortable as he did so; May Buxton was a favourite of Mr. Tomlinson's. He ruminated.

"Well?" said his wife.

"May Buxton, and perhaps her cousin Anne. Didn't you"—(meekly), "didn't you say the Buxtons might bring Anne?"

—"Anne Jefferies," said Mrs. Tomlinson, more briskly, as if to hurry him: "Well?"

"Oh, and that niece of Lady Shortlands.'"

"Miss Brand," said Mrs. Tomlinson, and she sniffed slightly.

“Yes, what’s her Christian name? some big name, rather a mouthful.”

“Eugenia. She’s very particular *not* to have it sounded in the French manner,” Mrs. Tomlinson added, as if it were a deprivation to her not to sound the “g” softer—“Eugenia,” and then she changed the sniff into a little snort.

Mrs. Tomlinson very often snorted : it was a habit, and sometimes it meant nothing. But in this case it had a certain significance, and moreover, Mrs. Tomlinson had to take a paper knife out of her mouth on purpose to give vent to it, which made it mean much more. What it meant was first, “Why in the world was she christened Eugenia?” and then, “Why in the world should her wish be consulted in its pronunciation?” Had the name been Emma, Mrs. Tomlinson might indeed have snorted, but it would have been with a different intention. Her own name was Emma—

Emma Jane—and she disliked it sufficiently to sign nothing but her initials and to permit the “unpresentable” to call her Emmeline. She would have snorted in that case at the associations of the name and the hardihood—not to say boldness—of owning to it in its plain entirety. Had the name been Eugénie, Mrs. Tomlinson might still have snorted, but her snort in that case would have conveyed a slight contempt for such a foreign appellation, and a regretful glance into modern history with a dash of sympathy for the woes of the ex-Empress of the French. Whence may be reasoned that Mrs. Tomlinson was a politician—she was more than that, she was a partisan, especially in foreign affairs, of which she liked “a bird’s-eye view”—and that her snorts were sometimes very comprehensive. But this identical one meant thus much exactly—

“Eugenia! *Why* Eugenia? Pooh!”

“I wonder who called her that?” said Mr.

Tomlinson, when he had exhausted the fruits of a meditative pause.

"Who called her what?" asked his wife. She knew what he meant, but she disliked his sharing her own resentment; moreover, she had long ago made up her mind to bring her husband, "as far as in her lay," to a habit of accurate speech.

—"Who called her Eugenia?" Mr. Tomlinson was wide awake by now.

"You might as well ask me who called her Brand. All *you* know about it is that she is Lady Shortlands' niece, and *her* name was Carruthers."

"I suppose she was *born* Brand, my dear?"

"*Born blind?*" said Mrs. Tomlinson, who was hard of hearing with her husband when she chose, and smarted, at the moment, from his lapse into a yawn. "What nonsense you *do* talk, Mr. Tomlinson! she's not a puppy." Having, however, mastered the pedigree of

her imminent guest, as carefully as if she had been a puppy, Mrs. Tomlinson could not resist repeating it. "The girl's mother is Lady Shortlands' sister—own sister to Lady Shortlands."—Mrs. Tomlinson could never help accentuating a title.—"And the Car-ruthers, I suppose, are good enough?"

"Of course they are," replied her husband, with a careless pomposity, which was all good humour; "but who was Brand?"

"There again you show your ignorance, Mr. Tomlinson; Brand was bluer than blue. He was the younger son of that old miser, Brand of Tidsworth, through whose land a certain railway runs which has something to do with your being the man you are."—Mrs. Tomlinson always spoke of her husband's resources as if she were responsible for them.—"I believe there is no family in England so proud of what they have to give—which in the younger sons' cases is next to nothing

by the way—or so chary of giving it. The eldest son married a Duke's daughter, as you know—or rather, as you don't know—the second son was to have married a Duke's daughter too, and a Marquis' widow into the bargain, Lady Uckleburgh; instead of that, he chose to marry Dorothea Carruthers—an invalid and a saint. And she and her father-in-law between them pulled him in two; I daresay this girl had a hand in it; he died of sheer worry, and girls are worriting"—

Here Mrs. Tomlinson stopped short in her recital, conscious of a lapse into her older phraseology, but her husband, who did not notice the lapse, was amused, and encouraged her gossip which was probably direct enough from Lady Shortlands, who never spared her own family.

“Well, since his son's death old Brand has never seen his daughter-in-law, though his

only grudge against her is that she is not Lady Uckleburgh, nor set eyes upon Eugenia. The heir is alive and has sons; why should he receive these women at Tidsworth? He would only have to pension them if he did, and as it is, he need do nothing for them whatever. They are as poor as rats, and if it were not for Lady Shortlands, the girl could never have gone out. She has made up her mind, now that she is well rid of her own daughters, that Eugenia must marry well. 'It is the wish of my heart, *dear* Mrs. Tomlinson,' she said, 'that this girl should punish her grandfather; nothing will punish him but a *bonâ fide* snub.' That's the real reason why she means to take her about, —and she is going to try it on with us," Mrs. Tomlinson concluded, with a touch of acerbity.

"Aha! So it's for this that you have asked Sir Edmund to meet them."

“Well; why not? He must marry, and Miss Brand is old enough to take care of him, she’s accustomed to an invalid mother.”

“But a husband is *not* an invalid mother”——

“It’s quite as provoking anyway; do let me speak. She will make him a very good wife: she is not young, you know, Mr. Tomlinson—not a chicken.”

“How old is she?”

“Lady Shortlands says eight-and-twenty; put her down at thirty, and you won’t be far out. Her mother was a mere child when she married Charlie Brand, and she looks every day of fifty now.”

Mrs. Tomlinson had never seen Mrs. Brand in her life. She had, indeed, caught Lady Shortlands’ jargon. Her husband always listened to her with amazement, when she discoursed so glibly about “Charlie Brand” and his compeers. Perhaps the first time

she had ever seen their names was in the obituary of her daily paper.

“Is the girl good-looking?” he asked. He was a pensive and a kindly old man, and he felt interested in this poor waif, with her life so cut out for her. Mrs. Tomlinson resented the question; there was only one answer that she could give, but she modified it.

“Yes, very; but I tell you she is scarcely a girl. Don’t you recollect her, though, at Chelmsford House, at the ball, a white creature, like a very good *blanc-mange*? You took her for Mdlle. Malakoffski, the Polish beauty.”

“Was that woman Eugenia Brand?”

“Yes; and why not, Mr. Tomlinson, pray?”

“She is coming here?”

“Well?”

“She will make everything about her look mean and small. Don’t you recollect at Chelmsford House—fine as it is, and fine as the company were—the only things that

seemed worthy to be in the same room with her were the music and the waxlights and the flowers; she put all her partners into shadow."

"She's not a giantess, as one would think from the ridiculous way in which you talk, and even if she were, I think Ashbank would hold her." Mrs. Tomlinson said this with the air of one who would snort again, if provoked.

"She will look well in the conservatories, at any rate." Mr. Tomlinson was very proud of his conservatories, and with good reason.

Mrs. Tomlinson did snort again; her husband was not only ridiculous, but far too sentimental. "I daresay you think you'll look well in the conservatories with her," she remarked with an uncalled-for sarcasm. "No, no, Mr. Tomlinson; not at your time of life. You will leave Miss Brand and the conservatories for Sir Edmund *if you please*." The note of the last three words would have better become them had they been "*if you dare*."

Mr. Tomlinson was rather nettled, though the tone was not unusual.

“And are you really going to lend yourself to this?” he said. “Why the poor dear chap is half a cripple, and that girl looks fit to be the head of any house in England.”

“Half a grandmother; fit to be the head of a dummy! He has sixty thousand a year.”

Mr. Tomlinson knew this statement to be true, and, as his wife was evidently more than a little ruffled, he dropped the subject.

But as he put the handkerchief back over his bald head, and sat on in the still warmth of the drowsy summer afternoon, listening to the scrape of Mrs. Tomlinson’s pen, engaged on its superfluous *memoranda*, and the occasional swish of her paper knife, he thought of Eugenia Brand. He had only seen her once; he was not a quick-sighted man, and he was certainly no sensualist, but Eugenia

Brand had impressed him as a most beautiful and a most distinguished woman. He felt that he scarcely liked her coming to Ashbank. It was not for himself that he disliked it but for her. He felt that she must resent it somehow, although he knew that her invitation had been literally asked for by her aunt. Mr. Tomlinson was uncomfortable about it, till, with a confidence bred of habit, he looked at his wife's back. He always trusted any social care to those broad shoulders, they would carry it through somehow. That plain head, so flat at the top, where the smooth hair lay thin, that ugly arrangement of lace about it—signs that she had no veneration, no fear of inequality—what was beauty to her? “Eugenia Brand? a fiddlestick!” If one can think a “fiddlestick,” that was just what Mrs. Tomlinson was thinking.

It was not quite a propitious attitude of mind for a hostess, but there was nothing

to be feared from that. Given the fact that Mrs. Tomlinson once invited Eugenia, her guest would have the best that she could give her, so long as she chose to stay. Her character was a more complex one than it was apt to look at the first glance. Her husband would have said that she was wonderful, Lady Shortlands would have said—and did say—that she was vulgar; but her husband did not know that she had the weakness of jealousy, and Lady Shortlands did not credit her with being clear-sighted. She was an exacting confidant and an implacable foe. But these qualities lay beneath the surface. Her salient characteristic of late years was that she was the lady of Ashbank. And to this characteristic, at least during her Ashbank sojourn, she was never false. While you were with her at Ashbank—what Spenser called an “entered guest”—you were quite safe—you were more than safe, you were in

clover. But you had to get there first, and afterwards you had to go away; and before you were come and after you were gone, there was no quarter given you. This was Mrs. Tomlinson's reading of exclusiveness. It meant not only shutting her doors as long as she could against you, but shutting them after you with a bang. She conceived that she owed this duty to Ashbank, but it never occurred to her that she owed any duty to her husband. If she was the slave of the mansion, she was at least its easy master's master.

The afternoon wore on, real August afternoon with its deep hush in it, and Mrs. Tomlinson from her window might have seen the basking glades and lawns, and caught the tinkle of sweet distant sheepbells. The scene that lay before her was none the less calm and silent because it was full of light and faintly suggested music. But her senses were quite

closed, she was intent on household cares. "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday," she murmured now and then, counting upon her fingers, and then "stables, picnic, ball." Her husband's sleep deepened, under this lullaby spell. The handkerchief drooped forward over his eyes, he slumbered on as an elderly man does slumber, when he is replete with luncheon and aware that his tranquil *siesta* is guarded by a wakeful wife.

Mrs. Tomlinson rose at last, and proceeded to make her tour through the rooms provided for her guests, which were all on the same floor with her own apartments, but separated off by baize doors and a big flowered *portière*, which had been one of the glories of Ashbank for a century but which she had occasionally thought of replacing by a pair of plush curtains.

These were the principal rooms along the corridor. To the right there was the blue

room for the Buxtons, with its adjacent dressing-room, commanding land views only, and next were two large chambers—destined for their daughter May and her cousin Miss Anne Jefferies — beautiful sunny apartments communicating with each other by double doors, alike set out with arm-chairs and fresh chintz-covered sofas, alike adorned with bright old fashioned screens and well furnished writing-tables, alike with big window-seats in the bay-windows, and chintz-hung beds; but in the further room some servants were placing a piano, as Mrs. Tomlinson passed through it on her way.

Beyond, but separated by intervening bath-rooms, was the *suite* to be occupied by Sir Edmund Trefusis and his valet, which included a pleasant sitting-room, for Sir Edmund was an invalid; and beyond again, close to the great staircase, a turning to the right led into a wing of rooms which Mrs.

Tomlinson did not require for the party she was expecting. Opposite to the Buxtons' quarters were the finer set destined for Lord and Lady Shortlands, with windows facing seawards, just now one blaze of light in their south-western aspect; bed-room, dressing-room, and boudoir. These were known as the Venetian rooms, by reason of the rare old hangings on their walls, sacked by the Tomlinsons themselves in some vandal raid upon the mouldering palaces of Italy. Opposite Sir Edmund's rooms, the great staircase wound down, stinting the southern side of the main part of the mansion, by its vast oriel window, filled with stained glass blazonry. This window divided the staircase, which was a double one, and on the small landing to leftward, close to Lady Shortlands' boudoir but separated from it by the turn of the wall and with its own little door opening directly on to the steps of the great staircase, was the room set apart for Eugenia

Brand. Mrs. Tomlinson made her visit to this chamber last of all, for the rooms to be inhabited by Mr. Henry Vane and the other men—a set of bachelors' apartments facing it, but on the further side of the great staircase in the western wing—did not merit her personal attention. She was quite satisfied with her survey of the Venetian rooms, the blue rooms, the chintz rooms, and even of Sir Edmund's daintily fitted Persian *suite*, which he had occupied before. There were sufficient flowers in all, and the writing-tables were amply stocked; but with Miss Brand's room Mrs. Tomlinson was not quite satisfied.

There was, we know, a certain contradiction in her character. Because she was not predisposed to like Eugenia, she would be the more careful not to slight her; but she had no intention of protecting her from incidental slights. Far from being beneath the other rooms in point of decoration this room ex-

celled them in luxury and in richness of furniture—the appointments of its writing-table were more precious, the stands of flowers more numerous. It had sometimes been used as a morning-room, for its attractions were enhanced by a superb view across the lawns, and over the wooded glades beyond them to the sea. But it had its drawbacks. It was immediately above the smoking-room, and its door opened directly opposite the bachelors' bed-rooms. Eugenia therefore could not fail to be disturbed if Sir Edmund or the others should keep late hours. The side wall of her room was so distinctly on the stairway that it was covered with armoury and pictures.

Mrs. Tomlinson, arrived at the end of her pilgrimage, sat down upon the sofa and debated whether she should not have this room altered to serve as Lady Shortlands' boudoir (which she would seldom need by day, and never in the evenings), and give

Miss Brand the adjacent room instead. This change could easily be made in a few minutes.

But somehow Mrs. Tomlinson did not make this change. Though it would have necessitated little more than the shifting of the small silk-hung bed from one room to the next, unaccountably or not Mrs. Tomlinson did not have the small silk-hung bed shifted. And she justified her obstinacy to her conscience, by saying to herself over and over again that she was sure Lady Shortlands would prefer to go through the dressing-room straight from her bed-room to her boudoir. Those three rooms, as it was, communicated; whereas there was no door of communication between those rooms and this. Having decided this point to her own inward satisfaction, Mrs. Tomlinson gave a last glance to Eugenia's room, the expression of her face being at the moment more defiant than anxious.

It was called "the tapestry room," and it was a square chamber, by no means large, and looking smaller than it was, because of the dark hangings that had given it the name, and because of the single square window in the southern wall, partially darkened by the near tendrils of rose, clematis and ivy. Although there were some rare old Venice mirrors on the wall, the general air of the contents was rather that of a chapel's than a bed-room's, the dressing-table was draped like an altar with lace of a yellowish hue, the counterpane had been a priest's vestment centuries ago. But there was a low bookcase in the dark corner, stored with richly bound volumes that would hardly have been in keeping in a chapel. The truth was that the books were relegated to these shelves before the room was made a bedroom, to prevent their being taken up by accident in one of the drawing-rooms downstairs. Their

rich morocco and gilding concealed the fine frankness of Massinger and Fielding and of some older French works, more curious, though quite as explicit, if of a less classic literary standard. Mrs. Tomlinson could, however, not be expected to know the contents of the French books, at all events, and on the large smooth writing-table, which was inlaid with Italian marbles, were a velvet-covered Testament, with a gold cross upon it, and an exquisitely illuminated Thomas-à-Kempis. It was one of Mrs. Tomlinson's rules, from a decorative point of view, that there should be at least two "good books" in every guest-room.

No doubt it was a charming apartment. As Mrs. Tomlinson looked round it from her place of vantage on the wide soft sofa, she felt with pride that "Miss Brand could not have a better room given her—not if she stayed in a palace." The tapestry hangings

were quite good company for a silent occupant, their dim visions glancing out, in the afternoon sunshine, in a very magical way. They presented no scripture scenes, or groups of laughing dames with baskets of heaped-up fruit, but rough battle and spoil of stuffs and armour, where bearded, bare-legged warriors were wrangling, oddly out of place in this flower-decked lady's chamber. Beautiful things too had collected here, under that spell of accidental fitness which things often obey. There was a silver *replica* of Michael Angelo's "Slave" for sole ornament upon the velvet mantelpiece; for Mrs. Tomlinson, or her predecessors, had the taste not to obtrude French clocks and ormolu against such a background, though from the open window there came in so sweet a seaside breath of honeysuckle and roses as would have mellowed even ormolu. Mrs. Tomlinson was one of the many people who know more than they

feel; and although the charm of the room meant nothing for her, she was aware that it would suit Eugenia, and she took care there should be nothing to undo its power.

She even went this length—incredible for her—she opened a blotting book upon the ebony writing-table before her, heavy with old encrusted silver shields upon its sides, and when she came upon some paper and envelopes blazoned with some of her own new dies in all sorts of fanciful and hideous distortions, she removed them, taking the trouble to go back to her own rooms and bring forth from her store other writing material on which the mere word “Ashbank” was stamped in quite plain silver letters. She did not think it smart enough for general use.

One more glance round! Yes; it was all perfect now, a room for a dreamer—were he poet or painter—a room to think in, to invent in; only not quite a young lady’s bedroom

with its short old-fashioned mirrors in their framing of ivory and silver and shadow. "Well! she can use the long glasses in Lady Shortlands' dressing-room." That was Mrs. Tomlinson's last word to herself, which showed that her conscience was not absolutely at rest.

Artistically she was right to leave things as they were; it would have been a pity indeed to shut out that fair picture of the August afternoon, which the window showed, with an orthodox toilet table, or to hide the brave sinews of the broidered warriors with the conventional tall sheet of lady's looking-glass. But though the reservation was artistic, it was not affectionate or kind.

And just then Mrs. Tomlinson was summoned to join her husband. He had finished his nap, indeed her search for the writing-paper had roused him. He had now been for some minutes watching the carriage-drive, from the window of his own den downstairs,

which commanded the front door at an angle. He met his wife upon the stairs. He was far more excited than she was.

“It is the landau,” he said, “for it is Tom, not Denys, driving; it must be the Buxtons.”

Mrs. Tomlinson did not think it worth while to reply. What did it matter who came first? She turned, with Mr. Tomlinson meekly following her, straight into a morning-room on the ground floor, where she usually received her guests. As she did so, she uttered, all to herself, the least little ghost of a snort. The spiritual warhorse in her soul neighed answer, and the business of her autumn campaign was launched at last.

CHAPTER II.

MATERIAL.

MRS. BUXTON was a small, faded woman, with an irritating way of saying, "*How* do you do?" as if the show of interest that she manifested in your health was a concession, to answer which would be a mere impertinence; and as she rarely said anything else to strangers, except "Thanks!" the first impression that she made was never quite undone. You would not have guessed, to look at her, that her family were the most considerable commoners in the county, and that it was from her past beauty that her handsome daughter inherited her pretty looks. For while Mr. Buxton—master of the hounds, and slave of

routine—was just a vacuous magnate of rents and acres, and had never been anything else to boast of, Mrs. Buxton had been Miss Dalrymple-Robarts, and the beauty of South Hants. It was sad that nothing should be left of that beauty but the little provoking manner, which had perhaps been attractive enough when self-consciousness had first dictated it some five-and-twenty years ago. It was want of energy, rather than illness, and dulness, rather than trouble, which had painted out all traces of Miss Dalrymple-Robarts in May Buxton's mother. But in May Buxton herself she was well content to bloom anew, so long as she retained that dignity of precedence which quondam beauty still conferred upon her.

May Buxton, who was the eldest of a large tribe of youngsters, was an admirable sample of the typical English girl. Her looks were fresh and her manners charming; she was just

ready for any moulding that circumstances might bring her; of that easy adaptable type that will become fat or lean, handsome or careworn, as time and treatment will, but of which it is always impossible to predict that you will be able to recognise it twelve years hence. She was a brown-haired, hazel-eyed girl, with a sweet mobile mouth, and a skin of cream and roses; as lovely as a flower, and with a charm that might be evanescent as a flower's perfume.

Her cousin, Anne Jefferies, who hung behind a little under Mr. Buxton's wing—not, indeed, from shyness, but for better observation of her aunt's reception—was in direct contrast to May. She was, in fact, younger, being not yet of age, while May Buxton was already two-and-twenty, but she looked older, and her face had quite a different expression, which it would be hard to define—perhaps as of her having first been altered by experi-

ence of the world, and then of having acquired strength to resist it. She was a dark, pale girl, with nothing handsome in her face but its gipsy eyebrows and its firm lines from ear to chin. But nobody took her looks into account—she was Sir Samuel Jefferies' only child, the greatest heiress in the county.

The two girls were rare friends. Bright, honest May Buxton, elder though she was, had not sufficient quickness of penetration yet, to see that her clear-eyed cousin made good use of her sometimes, and that the costly gifts Anne gave her were never quite disinterested tokens of goodwill. This very ingenuousness of May's was her passport to Anne's affection. In her decided, if impulsive, manner, she was sincerely fond of May. Mrs. Buxton liked Anne less than her daughter did, perhaps because she had never forgiven her plainer sister—Anne's late mother—for marrying the great Sir Samuel; and the history of the few pre-

ceding days will illustrate sufficiently the mutual relations of the three.

Since her mother's death, Anne Jefferies' home was a dull one, pompous and splendid though its adjuncts were, and she had a great wish to accompany her cousin on this visit to Ashbank. She did not know Mrs. Tomlinson, but she was aware that Mrs. Buxton had been asked to bring her to Ashbank, though it was from Mrs. Buxton's bosom friend that she had heard it and not directly from Mrs. Buxton—that lady, with a laudable maternal instinct, wishing that her daughter's charms should not be cast into the shade, under Mrs. Tomlinson's roof, by the halo of Anne's superior fortune. In fact, she did not mean to take Anne. But as soon as Anne had heard for certain that the date of the visit was fixed, she wrote a little letter to her dearest May, proposing to come over and stay with the Buxtons for this very week, and to bring for May, when

she came, a *facsimile* of some neat gold tennis ornaments of her own design, which she had once worn and her cousin had admired. May's girlish pleadings with her mother were, perhaps, a little the warmer for the remembrance how these pretty jewelled racquets had become her, not but that her own welcome to Anne was always hearty. Anyway, it ended in Mrs. Buxton's asking Anne to accompany them to Ashbank, and Anne was determined to find her visit there cheaply purchased by the case of shining trinkets, which were now in May's travelling bag, and no doubt responsible for her unusually radiant and animated looks.

The Buxtons and the Tomlinsons were comparatively near neighbours, and intimate enough not to need discuss the innovations, and—so-called—improvements at Ashbank; but Anne was a stranger, and Mrs. Tomlinson was anxious to enlist the approval of so important a personage; so, when some early tea was

served them, she devoted herself exclusively to the sallow heiress and her uncle, leaving Mr. Tomlinson to laugh with good-humoured May and make himself agreeable to her mother. That latter task was uphill work ; but certainly Miss Jefferies could be very pleasant when she chose. She had more insight into character than love of beauty, and her conscience was broad enough to allow her to praise some very hideous things, which, her discrimination suggested, were of Mrs. Tomlinson's own choice—a tiresome fountain that was plashing outside the open windows, where had formerly been only a statue, in the small, trim garden closed in with cypress trees ; and some “chair-backs,” embroidered in coloured silks and edged with fancy lace, the worst, because the most individual, outcome of Mrs. Tomlinson's hands at present. The one art for which Anne cared more than a straw, was music, in which she was not only critical and

conscientious, but gifted. "Music," she had once said, "is my only key to the passions and to religion. I am sensitive and good when I play." But the tennis ornaments showed that she had also a certain facility in design.

Talk flagged a little in the summer warmth, and indeed among these commonplace folk there was not the material for conversation. They were all people, each in his different way, who would live more by the appetites than by the intellect.

"What is your *programme* to-day?" Mrs. Buxton said at last. Life was like a play to her—a pageant, in which she did not interest herself too much; she had a sort of American temperament, that likes to see things happen constantly, it matters little what, provided that they bring no pain. She liked other people's parties.

"We expect Lord and Lady Shortlands directly," said Mrs. Tomlinson, glancing at

the clock. "I am afraid I must wait in for them; and Mr. Tomlinson wants to take Lord Shortlands—with Mr. Buxton, of course—over his model cottages, or something; so I fear the expedition must be put off for an hour or so. But, meanwhile, you and the girls may like to see your rooms." Ashbank was always Mrs. Tomlinson's resource.

"Whom else have you?" asked Anne, rather shortly; she hated seeing rooms, and she was not educated to fall in with others' plans, or to disguise her curiosity.

"No one as yet; unless Sir Edmund Trefusis is come. I fancy I heard the victoria, but he always goes straight to his rooms; he is easily tired, as you know, and we make no stranger of him." Mrs. Tomlinson said these last words in a higher tone, as with a touch of proper pride; it was something to be able to say that she made no stranger of Sir Edmund Trefusis. He was a man of

culture as well as wealth, and had his choice among all the best houses in the kingdom.

“Any other men?”

“Only Mr. Vane, to-night, I think, and a friend he brings with him; we generally look to him for our lion, in the way of a painter or a poet, in a small way, or some one who plays. It is absurd asking them; one just takes the one that isn’t somewhere else, or that is new.” Mrs. Tomlinson spoke of all artistic people as if they were orchids; but as with her orchids, she was careful, while she had the treatment of them, that they should have proper soil and nurture.

“I hope the little lion’s roar will be musical this time,” said Anne laughing.

“Miss Brand looks musical,” said Mr. Tomlinson, too rashly venturing in his oar.

“Who is Miss Brand?” asked Mr. Buxton, with the air of one who rather resents a fresh name. What was not “Hampshire” was to

him unknown. But before Mr. Tomlinson had formulated his answer, beyond its first statement that Miss Brand was Lady Shortlands' niece, and while he was yet uncertain what more Mrs. Tomlinson might let him say unhindered, Sir Edmund Trefusis came into the room.

He was rather high-shouldered and delicate-looking—he stooped a little forward, as he walked—but he had a very rare and expressive face. It was at once his advantage and his misfortune to inspire more compassion at a first glance, than he deserved: what with the sedentary studious life he led, and the care that had been taken of him, he looked more of an invalid than he really was. In fact, it was perhaps the extreme anxiety of his parents that originated a state of invalidism for their only son which his sorrow for their loss had completed. He had never yet loved any human creature so dearly as his mother, and

he had mourned her till between sorrow and seclusion he was seriously ill.

Lady Jane Trefusis had been a woman of singular talent and charm. She was devotedly attached to her husband, an iron-founder of enormous possessions and with other large sources of income besides the foundry. Socially his wife had been his sponsor. The son was but a boy, when he succeeded to his father's ten year old baronetcy, and he retained a greater reverence for that father's memory than he might have had, if he had grown up to see how far inferior he had been to Lady Jane in all but the gift of riches. It had been his mother's aim to foster his remembrance of his father into a religion. From Sir John Trefusis indeed, he had inherited two distinct qualities, he was both industrious and affectionate, though neither his affections nor his industry had yet found their proper sphere. From his mother and her training he had got

that special gift of winning sympathy—an almost feminine persuasiveness and charm—which distinguished him from his fellows. Her death had saddened his whole life; it had driven him in upon himself, and in the gravity of this reaction on his health, it was feared that he might be contracting some muscular, if not spinal, weakness. This, however, was not yet such as need debar him from society, and his slight limp was rather from the nervous affection than from absolute disease.

Sir Edmund, like most spoiled children, was apt to take unaccountable fancies, and in the progress of some foreign tour, had taken a decided fancy to the Tomlinsons. There was much that was likeworthy in them both, at their best, and they studied his tastes if they did not understand them. Moreover, they had no daughter—a strong recommendation for their intimacy to Sir Edmund after his experiences in London. As it was next to impossible that

there could be, in his fortunes or his career, anything to call out the pettiness of Mrs. Tomlinson's spites, she liked Sir Edmund, and she liked herself in his society. As for Mr. Tomlinson, he liked every one, except a few men who had borrowed money of him, but as is often the case with men of large heart and small discrimination, he liked many others equally with Sir Edmund who were not worthy to be ranked with him. He was apt to say of Sir Edmund, that he would "gladly see him well married" (for his own subjection did not prevent his idealising the bliss of wedded life), and Mrs. Tomlinson began to consider "the baronet" her matrimonial trump card. In fact, Mrs. Tomlinson, in her heart of hearts, thought Sir Edmund—whom, had that been possible, she would have liked to marry herself—"a deal too good for that Miss Brand;" but, as we know, Lady Shortlands had overpersuaded—not to say bribed—her into letting

them meet each other at Ashbank. Mr. Tomlinson saw a woman's beauty sooner than a man's virtue; he was even less tolerant of a man of intellect than he would have been of a mere bluff sportsman. He thought the whole scheme was "unnatural."

Sir Edmund received a very hearty welcome, and his pleasant simple manner commended itself at once to the Buxtons. Anne Jefferies looked at him with curious eyes: few men took her long to criticise. For him she had more interest, with her captious, frank, inquisitive gaze, than honest May Buxton had, with her gentle glance at his thin hands, and the sympathy that was too legibly written on her bright young face. Sympathy, so easily won, was not precious to Sir Edmund.

His journey had not been so long an one as usual, for he had started, not from his Cornish home, but from a lodge he had upon the Sussex coast, not many miles east of Ashbank by sea.

Still it was a journey with two changes in it, and he expressed himself as far too tired for his host's expedition to the model cottages.

"Let me stay with you, when they go," he said, turning to Mrs. Buxton with his charming smile, "if you will not too much despise Falstaff's 'little half-penny worth of bread to so much sack'?"

"They are not going just yet, I believe." Mrs. Buxton answered rather feebly.

Mrs Buxton did not understand what Sir Edmund said, nor what 'bread' and 'sack' had to do with it; but she liked his smile, and the deference he paid her. May Buxton, who knew her poets better than most English girls of her *calibre*, was delighted with him and with her own intelligence for recognising his quotation. Anne Jefferies thought he was a fool: not so much because he quoted poetry as because he smiled at Mrs. Buxton. And as it happened, Sir Edmund cared most what Anne

Jefferies thought! As he looked at her, he was perusing her pale face—pale from the even current of her blood and not from sickness. He noted too with interest her extreme carelessness as to any impression she might be making—the carelessness of a very rich woman with an assured position. In return, she watched with something of contempt his listless attitude, as he leaned back in an arm-chair, and the half-shy, half-pleading look in his brown eyes.

They were very different ingredients in a country house party: Anne might prove a valuable friend to Sir Edmund, if she could get to like him.

“You are the Miss Jefferies, of whose playing I have heard so much,” he said, as their eyes met; “my friend Lord Torre will talk of nothing else.”

“I do play,” Anne answered rather curtly—she disliked compliments, although she would

be grateful for Sir Edmund's praise if he proved musical ; and then, as if afraid she had been rough and not known how to use him, she said, "Are you fond of music?" hating herself for the inadequacy of the term, as she spoke it. "Yes," Sir Edmund *was* "fond of music:" and his face, as he said so, showed that in his case the phrase had a meaning. He studied music too. He had brought the score of Tronchetti's new opera from Italy: it was in his portmanteau:—Miss Jefferies might like to see it?

"I daresay Mrs. Tomlinson will let us make some music together in the mornings," said Anne, turning to her hostess with an air that made the request a concession. (Sir Edmund had a rather weak chin under his beard, Anne thought, she must speak for him.)

Sir Edmund turned to May: he wanted to enlist her too. "Oh, Anne plays beautifully," she cried impulsively, as she felt the question

he was going to ask her, "I do nothing."—Afterwards May Buxton said to Anne that Sir Edmund's eyes had made her feel that she must speak, and then as if she must say something gentle—"something like 'poor,' you know, Anne." "Something like 'rich' you mean," Anne answered. Gentleness did not appeal to her. But that was by-and-by. What Anne thought just now was that she would like to decipher the score of Tronchetti's opera.

Mrs. Buxton had not had time to yawn, before Mr. Vane was announced: she was only half sorry for that. She would have liked to yawn in Mrs. Tomlinson's face very much, during the first hour of her visit; that would have been quite in her old manner, but she liked Mr. Vane better. He was her perpetual boon, and she could yawn in Mrs. Tomlinson's face to-morrow.

Mr. Vane was a gentleman—nobody quite knew who; and he had come from somewhere

—nobody quite knew where. He described himself as “a loafer” or an “idle fellow.” “Loafer” is a wide term perhaps, but he was not an “idle fellow” certainly, and whatever “loafing” may be, he made society too much his business to have many moments left to “loaf” in. He had organised two clubs—in town and on the river—the town club had given a ball, and the ball and the clubs between them had brought him under everybody’s ken. After the success of the ball, people began to ask each other where he came from, and what he was, and would have gone on asking until they had discovered that the Lincolnshire parson, whose son he was, had proved as ill-conducted as he was poorly connected. Happily, at this juncture, his sister who had never even been to London, married the local squire, and her newly acquired position among the county families became her brother’s fresh guarantee, when his novelty

had worn off, and society, with its strange caprice, began to redemand his passport. He was "Lady Talbot's brother," and although nobody had ever known Lady Talbot, nor seen Talbot within the memory of man—and indeed Talbot had been for thirty years a mute cripple and half-imbecile—everybody knew that he at least existed, and his place was marked upon the county map. That was enough: a poor sort of compensation to devoted Lady Talbot, no doubt, for her monotonous sick-nurse life, that she was her brother's social shield and spear, but *some* compensation it might have been, poor soul! had she had the faintest inkling that such was the case. There are queer see-saws in life; and Mr. Henry Vane, when he came down to Lincolnshire, was regarded in the light of a London idol, spoiled and splendid, who kindly gave up a few days of his visiting tour to his sister and her sick husband, the fact being that

his sister and her sick husband were what assured him his visiting tour at all.

He was a man who took philosophically all that life brought him—only that, with a wise man's reservation, he asked always “a little better and a little more,”—and, by now, it was quite the case that he conferred as much distinction upon people like the Tomlinsons, by his coming, as they gave him comfort during his stay. His place was an established one. “We cannot *get on* without Vane:” and he always had the newest news and the last jackanapes at his bidding.

This time he had brought down “a poet;” partly because the said poet was the younger son of a Scotch peer, and Vane knew that Mrs. Tomlinson liked peers—if not English, then Scotch—and their sons—if not elder then younger; and partly because he knew that Miss Jefferies and Sir Edmund Trefusis could “manage the music between them.”

If they wanted a novelty he could always write to the Royal Academy for a musician, but a poet required more peculiar treatment. And then Vane was fond of his young friend James Chatteris—a slim brown-haired youth with a large sensitive mouth and a small nervous hand—and he had long promised “Jem” the pleasure to be derived from a visit to Ashbank, and Mrs. Tomlinson the pleasure to be derived from knowing “Jem’s” people, whose solitary Scottish home neighboured the moor her husband rented.

Miss Jefferies, indeed, was frank enough to be a little disappointed at the poet, but his novelty and his name secured him cordial welcome from the rest. May Buxton had never met “a poet” and rather fancied he would speak in verse—a fancy that his look did not dispel.

Vane’s manner was a study : always slightly in extremes but never servile or impertinent, he varied it becomingly, as he addressed each

member of the group. He was genial to Mrs. Tomlinson, and almost affectionate to her husband, while he was sufficiently intimate with Sir Edmund and self-possessed towards her distinguished self to make Mrs. Buxton venerate his tact more than before. He set "Jem" at home with Anne Jefferies and May Buxton, in just such nicely shaded patronage as seemed to imply that May had his true liking, Anne his profound respect, and the young poet his kind consideration, but that at the same time he considered them all very small people.

"I insisted upon bringing Jem on from Westnor Castle with me," he said. "I knew you had his book."

Mrs. Tomlinson certainly had his book; she had got it at Mr. Vane's own suggestion, but what she had done with it, where it was, whether she had seen it, or whether she hadn't, she could not, for the life of her, remember.

Sir Edmund came to her relief. "Ah! it is in my room," he said kindly. "I glanced at some delightful things in it, before I came downstairs, while I was resting my prescribed half hour."

"Oh, yes! one copy of it, I daresay," said Mrs. Tomlinson, fearing that he might go on to remark that its pages were still uncut. But he was too discreet to do so, and was watching the young author with some interest.

"Are you a student of poetry as well as of music?" asked Anne; she was still sitting next to Sir Edmund.

"More," he answered; "I think it requires a less special apprenticeship." Then, after a pause, he added, "I was going to quote Shakespeare again—one of his sonnets; but I recollected that you did not like to hear me quote Shakespeare."

Anne looked up, surprised; her conscience

pricked her; she took refuge in a sort of *hauteur* that was all shyness.

“Honestly,” she said, “I have read very little poetry; and sometimes, when I hear people making quotations, I mistake what they say for exaggerated speech of their own.”

“I shall never forget Anne, one evening—at your ‘Dilettanti’ ball, Mr. Vane,” put in May, turning her graceful neck from Sir Edmund to Vane, and then back again to Sir Edmund;—“when she came out on to the balcony, close to a window in which I was sitting with mamma. She had been dancing with Herbert Rondesleigh, and you know what a man he is for quoting poetry. It was a lovely starlit night, and as they passed us, he said to her in his loud tone, as if he had a perfect right to say it—as, indeed, he had,—‘Sit, Jessica!’ You should have seen Anne’s face, in its gradual

change from utter bewilderment to sheer contempt ! ”

“ We have often called her ‘ Jessica ’ since,” said Mrs. Buxton, to fill up a pause ; the story was but half appreciated.

“ Who *is* Jessica ? ” said Mr. Tomlinson, willing to laugh, but puzzled.

“ Jessica was the Jew’s daughter,” Sir Edmund explained, in his innocent way ; “ Shylock’s best treasure.”

It was rather an unfortunate speech ; for Sir Samuel Jefferies was of Hebrew extraction, and the great fortune Anne was to inherit had been said to have first sprung from usury. Miss Jefferies did not think the better of Sir Edmund for his explanation—for there was an intelligence in his manner that made one apt to fancy that he was satirical—and May Buxton was so unused to regulate the frank expression of her face that she looked absolutely pained. Anne broke the

silence herself, by enlightening Mr. Tomlinson.

"I know now," she said, in a high tone, "that it is from that passage in the 'Merchant' about the 'young-eyed cherubim.'"

"What's that, eh?" said Mr. Buxton sharply; "'the *one*-eyed cherubim?'" And at this the laugh was general.

"Talking of cherubim," said Mrs. Tomlinson, who would have argued that a cherub was an angel, and an angel a beautiful creature, but who—argument apart—had a way of setting her speech in rather vague concatenation,—"talking of cherubim, Mr. Vane, you know that Lady Shortlands is going to bring Miss Brand?"

Vane looked up sharply, in the midst of a second laugh that was rewarding Mrs. Tomlinson's unconscious humourism.

"Ah!" he said; "she is really coming, then? I wonder how you will like her; she

is not like others, and yet she is not eccentric."

"They have been due this half hour," said Mrs. Tomlinson, who was not disposed to discuss Eugenia as a being of a different order; "and it is only for Lord Shortlands that Mr. Tomlinson is delaying his expedition to the model cottages and farms. I am so sorry that Mr. Buxton should have to wait for him."

Mr. Buxton, who was punctual and loved a grievance, looked as if he were sorry too.

"Do you mind about model cottages?" said James Chatteris softly to May. He was a good young fellow and very tender-hearted, but he liked to affect the languid tone of a man of the world; he did not care for things much, but it was more from inexperience than from fatigue.

"Oh, I do like them!" she answered with her sunny, candid glance, "and farms, and

everything," (which was about the truth): "I often tell mother I had much sooner live in one of the farms at home than at the house."

"Did you know that Mrs. Brand and her daughter live at a farm of Lord Shortlands' down in Surrey?" said Mr. Vane; "he has given it to them; he likes to have them near him, for his niece is one of the few people he hears."

"I suppose she bawls." said Mrs. Buxton; her suppositions were generally unpleasant; she was the kind of woman that one does not envy her dreams.

"And do they make farming pay them?" Mr. Buxton asked; he prided himself on being always practical.

Vane only laughed: "I don't think you'd take Miss Brand for a 'neat-handed Phillis,' would you, Mrs. Tomlinson?"

"I should not take her at all," said Mrs. Tomlinson rudely; she had a notion that a

“neat-handed Phillis” was another term for a house-maid.

Sir Edmund listened, his attention arrested. He cared much less about surroundings than James Chatteris did, who was rather shocked at hearing of the farmhouse home. Sir Edmund sometimes wished he lived at a farm-house himself; his great possessions were a burthen to his conscience.

“I should think she was a surprise to the natives—” began Mr. Tomlinson.

“Nonsense,” said his wife sharply and much to Mr. Vane’s amusement, annoyed with this persistent recurrence to the praise of Eugenia, and saying more than she meant in her determination to put a stop to his “rhodomontades.”—“She is tall, of course, and fine-grown, but otherwise she is a very ordinary-looking girl.”

. . . What was it made Sir Edmund turn again to Miss Jefferies, with that almost pettish

sigh? Perhaps the mere words "tall and fine-grown," which Mrs. Tomlinson's context endowed with such significance. He had been curious about Miss Brand, now he felt shy of her. He seemed to feel his own deficiency, from the very words meant to suggest Eugenia's. "She is tall, of course." He wondered what she was like, and why Vane was so silent and had such a satirical look in his eyes. Why did he not agree with Mrs. Tomlinson, or contradict her? Vane always had an opinion.

Sir Edmund had not long to wait. Just as Mrs. Buxton was giving her daughter that first little tired glance, which was the prelude to her yawn, Lord Shortlands was announced, on the stroke of the half hour, and he entered the room with Eugenia. For a moment no one but Mrs. Tomlinson saw Lord Shortlands; they were all gazing at the "very ordinary-looking girl."

CHAPTER III.

SPIRITUAL.

YOUR first impression when you looked at Eugenia Brand was that she was not a girl but a woman, your next that you were not a man but an ape. It was only when you had mastered these involuntary shocks of reverence and of humiliation, that you could tax her appearance critically, and your subsequent verdict was a thought embittered by them both.

Women generally said of her first, when they had found their tongues, that she was "no longer young," and men that she was "cold." As the world reckons, both these opinions were well founded. She was eight-

and - twenty, and she was very self-centred. What was noteworthy was that neither men nor women troubled to say to each other that she was handsome, after they had once remarked her. There was no need to say so, and the term was not adequate. She looked as if she could not have been other than she was—handsome, certainly, and with that air of beautiful growth about her that made it impossible for you to think of her as having ever had her ugly moments. You were quite sure that she had been a beautiful girl, a beautiful child, a beautiful baby. You were quite sure that her mother was a beautiful woman, and her grandmother before her. People might find to say of her that she was silent, even that she was shy, never that she was plain.

And yet she had not the looks that box your ears, or that draw men, as by a burning glass, across a room. She was tall, but her

abundant hair was only brown, not gold, (and no one but her mother ever saw it in its full beauty), her clear eyes were grey, not blue, her lips were rather pale than red, and her smile rare. Men like Vane, who dared be very critical, would notice that her teeth were perfect—of a transparent purity that was like fine china—that the white of her eyes and the blue of her veins were those of a woman who had never known an hour's ill-health or a day's unrest. She had qualities, not ways, like a well-grown shrub more than a conscious creature; she was like lilac or laurel, there was something about her ever sweet and fragrant; you could not make allowances for her, and you did not think that you could hurt her.

And yet any one who could have looked at Eugenia without bias of either sex, had that been possible, might have seen that, if occasion were, she would feel greatly and suffer

much: all these fine nerves and splendid senses might become chords intense with passion. But she had arrived at her full womanhood with no traces of struggle, for this reason: what affected others mostly seemed to her too trivial matter for disquiet; under what fevered them her pulse beat equably. Her mother's poverty, her few dresses, the narrow sphere of her pleasures—these were things that gave her no moment's vexation: the morning, for all this, was for her still the morning, and the evening the prelude of sleep. What she felt, you were fain to decide, would not be intolerance or envy, what she suffered would not be mortification or false shame; only a great grief would move her much, only a great pain would hurt her. It takes a deep plummet to sound great depths, one says, a lightning bolt to blast the native rock. One says this, but one is too apt to forget that a common stone, once dropped into the well,

must sound it to the bottom, that a mimic engine placed against the rock may blast it to its core.

Meanwhile Eugenia Brand was tall, and she had a face that it helped one to see, with the brown hair turned over backwards from a forehead like a child's, and deep grey eyes under a child's lashes, and a most sweet mouth not overswift at talking. And the expression on her face was womanly and self-possessed. Every man present noticed the way in which her head was set upon her neck, no man perhaps noticed more, but the women marked her dress—a plain, grey, morning-dress, warm for the time of year, with a broad leathern belt about the waist—and her plain hat that sheltered her but let her see. She wore leathern gloves, and for all ornament a Runic cross of silver, old and rare, that lay upon the plaited bosom of her gown, and some useful things, also of silver, that were attached to her belt. In her

belt too, were some of those little round marigolds that have a ring of darker colour round their golden centres, and give a faint myrrhy smell. Eugenia had gathered them in her garden at Shortlands, not for a sentimental leave-taking, but from delight in the beauty of their colours, as they pressed against her grey skirt; but as their perfume was not sweet, she had put, with them, some leaves of the lemon verbena, drooping a little now after the long journey, and a sprig of rosemary.

“I am sorry you have no proper travelling dress,” Mrs. Brand had said with a sigh, but Eugenia, as she kised her mother, had literally not found a thought to spare upon her wardrobe.

“This does very well, mother,” she had answered; “if Aunt Agatha is ashamed of me, I shall be back with you the sooner.” It never even occurred to her what Mrs. Tom-

linson would think, or whether others would be better dressed at Ashbank.

Lord Shortlands was a little way in front of Eugenia; he was rather gouty, and he was very deaf, but he was in high good humour. He knew that he should like the Ashbank cooking, and change of air had already begun to give him an appetite for it, which he would not spoil by tea.

—"But you will send some up to my poor lady," he said, as he declined it for himself. "She is knocked all to pieces by the travelling, and has gone straight to her room."

"*Miss Brand* is not tired," said Mr. Tomlinson, with that embarrassing manner, which some old gentlemen assume, that calls attention to the person they affect (as if he would have added "Look at her! *I* know about *Miss Brand*, and the sort of stuff *Miss Brand* is made of;") but he dropped that manner after he had shaken hands with Eugenia, and stood

looking on in silence, while Mrs. Tomlinson made her known to her circle, of whom, as it happened, she as yet knew only Vane.

Eugenia did not particularly like Mr. Vane : she could not help the feeling, when she met him at great houses, that he had pushed and striven to be there ; and pushing and striving were alike against her instinct. Moreover, though he much admired her, he did not trouble to be at his best with her ; she had still her way to make, and she might not make it. Vane never committed himself to a friendship. She was indifferent too to the Buxtons, but she had a glance of interest for James Chatteris, of whose book she had heard. Her unformed opinion might perhaps have been that he was much too young to have written poems about Life and Love, but she did not formulate opinions readily, and she was thirsty after her drive in the sun. She sat down between Mrs. Tomlinson and Vane and drank

her tea : Lord Shortlands was being shouted to about the model farms and cottages, and, so long as he heard, there was no need for her to talk. Mrs. Buxton said afterwards to May that Eugenia had “made a display of herself,” and “expected to be admired :”—this was the effect of her having happened to sit down facing the windows. After a few moments Mrs. Tomlinson made Anne Jefferies, who was on her other side, known to Eugenia, and then it was Sir Edmund’s turn.

He had resumed his seat when Eugenia sat down, and was turning over a book of photographs, and awaiting his hostess’ pleasure. Now she introduced him, and he got up out of his chair again. It was a deep, low chair, and as he was cramped by some irons which he wore for his lameness, he rose with difficulty. Eugenia saw this, and having heard of his ill-health from Lady Shortlands, who was more explicit than reticent about people’s

misfortunes, she imagined him to be really deformed. From a wish to help him, she rose quickly and put out her hand, with a kind girlish gesture, whereas he had expected her only to bow. There was no mistaking her meaning, and a red flush spread itself over his pale forehead as he rose too.

“I beg your pardon,” he said awkwardly ; he was seldom awkward, and he did not know what made him speak so. Eugenia did not answer ; she felt that she had made a mistake : then—to explain it, not to cover it—she said gently :

“I hope that you are better.”

Her grave tones might have pitied either his illness or his sorrow, till she added as she got her courage back a little : “My aunt tells me that you are not strong.” She was still speaking with that solicitude in her voice which perfect health assumes towards unknown weakness.

“ I am a cripple,” he answered her quickly. As they stood looking at each other, his eyes were on a level with her lips, and he saw them move as if she were going to speak, but she said nothing; the divinest pity does not waste itself in words. Then she gave him her tea-cup to put down.

The action was too slight to be called significant: she gave it to him to fill up the moment's pause, but, to Sir Edmund, she seemed to mean, “ At least you can do something for me.” She satisfied his heart with a sense of perfect rightness. He loved Eugenia.

But still, she hurt him; as he sat down again, after inquiring after Lady Shortlands' health, he felt small and mean. “ She is as grand as she is good,” he thought.

“ It was very kind of you to ask me with my aunt,” Eugenia said to Mrs. Tomlinson. “ You are to have a dance, I hear ? ”

It was quite an ordinary girl's question,

but she could not help that she asked it in a way Mrs. Tomlinson disliked, as if it were an effort for her to put herself down to her hostess' level.

"How are you off for men in this neighbourhood—odd men, I mean?" put in Mrs. Buxton; *her* question sounded commonplace enough, and was asked in serious earnest.

"Oh! we get over officers from Portsmouth, when we want dancing men," said Mrs. Tomlinson. Mrs. Buxton looked pensive, she knew that there were officers and officers.

"I forget the regiments—are they presentable?" she asked.

"Oh, quite!—for that sort of thing—the White Highlanders; not intellectual or musical, but a very pleasant set, and they are always delighted to come."

"I hope they are as delighted to go!" said Eugenia to Anne, laughing, for Mrs. Tomlinson had included her in an arch glance

towards Anne and May, and the notion that she was expected to derive pleasure from this military contingent struck her as absurd.

“That reminds me,” Mrs. Tomlinson added, lapsing into the inconsequence of her favourite phrase, “that I am going to send Jebb over with a note, to ask some of them for tennis to-morrow; we shall want active players. I suppose”—to Mrs. Buxton—“I ought to write to the Colonel, though Captain Molyneux, Lord George’s son, is really our friend; I think *he* may be away on leave; they are rather a mixed set, you see.”

“Tell the Colonel to pick out the best connected ones!” suggested Anne.

“You might add a limit to the size of their checks;” said Eugenia, who began to be amused at Mrs. Tomlinson, and who was not without a sense of humour, “At Lady Dora Strutt’s the other day, you had to look at two together to arrive at the pattern of

their clothes—no one man's back was broad enough to hold it—and oh! Mrs. Tomlinson, do put a postscript about their conversation.”

—“Only to speak when they are spoken to,” chimed in Sir Edmund, laughing also as he took her tone. Eugenia's silence might be formidable, but she was not serious. He quite recovered his composure, though her gaiety put the last touch to James Chatteris' subjection, and as for May Buxton, who was watching her, and who “never could say clever things—Anne could,” May Buxton adored her already.

In truth Eugenia looked adorable enough. With one of her peculiar gestures, half proud and half simple, she had taken off her hat, which somehow slipped off easier than other people's hats, and had laid it, with her leathern gloves, in her lap. Her brown hair, a little ruffled from the journey, spared a few soft fine locks which were lying loose, but close,

about her forehead. The mass of it, which was brushed back, was gathered into a thick knot behind, the colour of leaves in autumn. The group round her began to be aware that there was a fine presence among them; even Mrs. Tomlinson felt it, and the feeling did not make her like Eugenia the more. She let the two girls talk to her, and crossed the room to despatch her note by Jebb, and to send some tea to Lady Shortlands.

It was the signal for a general move. Lord Shortlands expressed himself ready, and started, with his host and the all-important Mr. Buxton, to see the farms and cottages, which had been built upon some new principle, sanatory, but most distasteful to the tenants. Mr. Vane and his *protégé* accompanied them on their way, though it was doubtful whether either of them "minded much about the model cottages." Then Mrs. Buxton gave her girls a sign, and of a sudden Eugenia found herself left by the

tea-table with Sir Edmund, Mrs. Tomlinson installed, like Cerberus, at her writing-table a few yards away. She had triple vigilance though she had but one head. She was in the habit of saying it was "as good as anybody else's three,"—a statement, unfortunately, not open to proof.

Sir Edmund felt at home with Eugenia by this time, though he had recurring sensations of shyness as the circle broke up. Her beauty was of the sort that seems to make itself a right to whatever place it occupies, and even after these few moments in her company, Sir Edmund was wondering how he could ever have thought Mrs. Tomlinson's morning-room complete without her.

Eugenia herself was of that unexcited nature that does not find proximity to a man sufficient cause for flutter. She had finished her tea, and was refreshed, but she still preferred resting to conversation. She sat by the table

and drew her long gloves through her fingers in an absent-minded fashion. She was not thinking of anything in particular, but her look was an incentive to Sir Edmund. To a nervous, ardent nature like his, nothing is perhaps less tolerable than the air of inattention on a face that looks as if it might be interested. It is the visible sign of a lost moment. Here was Eugenia, all at his disposal, and he made no claim upon her.

“You do not like soldiers?” he asked her presently, not because he needed to hear her answer, but because he wanted to make her attend to him.

She did not trouble to say “yes” or “no” —she smiled gradually.

“Because I said that?” she answered. “I don’t like large checks, and I don’t like small talk. I have generally found that officers are fond of both; they do very well when they are silent and in uniform.”

"Oh! you like them then?"

"They give me a satisfactory impression of strength."—She paused, too quickly for her arrest to escape his notice.

"And so you don't like cripples?" he said, before she could correct her speech.

She did not attempt evasion. "I am very sorry," she said softly, almost in a tone of reverence, "do you have pain? I cannot imagine bad pain, but I am sure it gives people a value. My mother suffers." He looked at her, half with shrinking and half with gratitude, he knew that it had cost her something to say that. Her confidences were not on the surface.

Eugenia had a way of sitting still that was almost like movement—a way of silence that was as adequate as articulate speech. Her lips were just parted, and her eyes, though they looked down, were not inactive. They seemed only to be not looking at *you*, because

they were looking at your thoughts, which perhaps lay on her knees, (Sir Edmund fancied), as the Greeks said our future lay "on the gods' knees." He felt that she was thinking about him, although he could not meet her gaze.

Mrs. Tomlinson's pen scraped on in the stillness: the pen's scraping and the fountain's plashing filled the pause. Presently Mrs. Tomlinson stopped writing, and the cessation of the sound brought Eugenia to herself. She rose and expressed her wish to join Lady Shortlands upstairs.

"Oh, surely there is no hurry for that," said Mrs. Tomlinson, who knew that Lady Shortlands wished first to discuss the field with her. "I am going up to her myself, to see that she has all she wants, and you and Sir Edmund must not be strangers. He is at home here, and he must show you my conservatories. If you step out of that window, you will find yourself in the glass ranges

immediately, and you are fond of flowers I can see, because you have some in your belt." This with a glance, between compassion and contempt, at Eugenia's drooping marigolds, which possessed Sir Edmund with a fierce desire to replace them from some flowers of his own choice.

And so, between talking and fastening her note for Jebb, Mrs. Tomlinson wandered out of the room, before Eugenia could answer. Both she and Sir Edmund had risen, and were standing facing each other. It was rather a difficult moment.

"Shall we go?" he said, and as she had no valid reason for not going, they went.

Mrs. Tomlinson's "glass ranges," as she called them, were the joy of her heart and the envy of half the county. Eugenia, whose life had been as simply ordered as a peasant's, had never imagined anything in the least like them for culture and display. At

Shortlands, there were but few gardeners, and they drew their ancestral wages without much care for botany. Here you went on from one great stretch of lofty glass into another, in an enchanted atmosphere of light and sweetness. These special house-conservatories were arranged with a path straight through them, the flowers banking down from a tall background of immemorial camellias on either hand. Their dark and glossy leaves, unrelieved at this season by any blossom, set off all the better the glowing colours of the alamander and the lesser plants before them. The lowest of these were mere border flowers, flush with the ground—for the pots were sunk—while the highest only let you catch a glimpse of this dark wall of leaves, before light twining creepers hid the glass above. And everywhere, about and overhead, shone starry blooms, like butterflies in sunlight, some naturally hanging from the roof, some

exquisitely grouped in baskets massed with fern, where the frailest orchids exhaled an almost overmastering scent. Fountains added motion and sound to the fairy scene, and made each live blossom like a tropic bird in song.

The tiled path was a narrow one, borders of fern and maidenhair throwing their dainty fronds across it, and Eugenia went first, her brown hair still uncovered, her grey dress making for Sir Edmund's eyes the patch of soberness and life he needed, amid the sameness of all this inanimate glow. She was still holding her hat and gloves in her left hand, with her right she touched from time to time, the top of some taller plant or lesser shrub as she passed it ; she seemed to make a coolness through the glaring heat. She did not once look behind her, because she dreaded to see that her companion walked with pain, but he had half-forgotten the awkwardness

of his nervous gait—which indeed was not always perceptible—in watching her lithe movements. How much better she was than the rest of the summer flowers, showing under the crimson lamps of the creepers—passion-flower and hybiscus—like a young palm, he thought, or a bit of Solomon's seal!

They did not speak for some minutes; not indeed until Eugenia had reached the end of the narrow path, when she, perforce, turned in the direction which the range of glass took to the left, round the corner of the house. Then she said, but without looking at Sir Edmund, "I had no idea there could be anything so beautiful."

"The conservatories are perfect of their kind," he answered, only half thinking of his words, "but I confess I do not care for them."

"Oh, that is what I wanted to say," said Eugenia, brightly; "but I feared lest I might

seem ungrateful. Now I know you think as I do ; all this is not half so natural or good as an open-air walk amid the bracken. It is like a court-dress for everyday wear."

She shook the handle of the door at her right, impatiently, as she spoke, but it was locked. Sir Edmund had come close to her by now, and they stood like two prisoners in a palace of exhausted air, looking out into the shady alleys of the garden.

"One cannot breathe at first in this atmosphere," he said, "but one becomes acclimatised."

And Eugenia too began to feel the charm of the place steal over her. Involuntarily she half-sighed, as she stooped over the white upturned face of a gardenia. Her eyes looked limpid and more almond-shaped, she was beginning to be mesmerised a little by the scent-laden air and by Sir Edmund's earnest glance.

"I lead an out-door life," she said quietly, making an effort to resist the spell.

"Yes," Sir Edmund answered, "that is what you have done with your days,—spent them 'amid the bracken.'"

"At Shortlands, yes;" said Eugenia, with a smile: "but you forget—I mean you do not know—that I have spent many days where there was no bracken;—by the sea," she added half to herself, and for Sir Edmund her voice had the deep sea's sound in it.

"Ah!" he said, "by the sea; as if I could not have told it! You have not only the fern-life in you, but the life of wind and wave"—he stopped abruptly, he had spoken fervidly, foolishly perhaps; he felt that he was hard to answer.

"Yes," said Eugenia, still quietly; "there is that also"—she was thinking of the effect that natural things had on her, not of her-

self—"I lived most of my life at a little village near Worthing, with my mother."

"Tell me," said Sir Edmund in the same quiet tone, so much easier to talk with—even in paradoxes—than the tone of surprise.

"There is not much to tell," answered Eugenia, whose smile had not left her. "I suppose no one's life has been less eventful than mine, since my father's death,—and I remember little of the time before. We wandered about. I was not twelve when he died."

"What made you choose Worthing?" asked Sir Edmund.

"We did not choose it," said Eugenia, "and it was not Worthing. You see I am more truthful than grammatical. You have heard of old Corafume?"

Sir Edmund had heard of the atheistic old astronomer, who was reputed to have been the greatest rascal of his time, but he did not say that he had heard that verdict.

"He had been my father's friend once." said Eugenia simply; "When he died he left his house, and what small means he had, to a woman who had nursed him."

Sir Edmund started. The story had been one of the scandals of his young manhood, and, easily as he forgot scandals, this one was half-historical and had lodged in his memory.

"She soon tired of the little house without him," Eugenia went on—for she had not observed his astonishment—"but she had some difficulty in getting a tenant, and she let it to my mother just as it stood—library and all—to rent at a nominal sum when she went abroad. We lived there fourteen years, paying her fifty pounds a year. We should have been there now but for Lord Shortlands' wish that we should be near him. We live at Shortlands' farm now, as you know."

“You have been very unfair to yourself,” said Sir Edmund, with a motive in testing her of which he was half ashamed. “You said you had lived there since you were twelve, and now you say you lived there fourteen years—Do you know that you are crediting yourself with twenty-six summers?”

“And I am nearly twenty-eight,” said Eugenia, her smile becoming wider and more charming, “it is my length of days and not myself that I am wronging. Yes, indeed, we lived at Wisdean fourteen years, and this is the second autumn we shall have been at Shortlands. I had time to read all the dry old books in the poor Marchese’s library, so if any one should know about Italian history, it is I! But, alas! I know very little about anything: I have gleaned something of geography I think, but I have been to few places.”

“I am not five years older than you are,” said Sir Edmund, with a dash of pride which

he could not restrain, "and I am a cripple, but I have seen all the world."

"I daresay;" said Eugenia—she was not one to be moved by travel—"my consolation must be that you have exhausted only this planet, and that—thanks to the old observatory at Wisdean—as regards Saturn and Jupiter, not to speak of the moon, I am at least your equal."

"I am sure you know more of heaven than I do;" said Sir Edmund in his deep low-toned voice, but though he said it, he did not feel that he was paying Eugenia an empty compliment. She was not apt to bridle.

"I always think of Wisdean as my home," she went on, quite at her ease with Sir Edmund now. "I am sure you would have liked the house, though it was so little, and so close to the village road. Between its windows and the garden wall there grew a row of cypress-

trees, with a Greek name—the ‘long-fruited cypress;’ they were called.”

“Cupressos makrokarpos?”

“That was it. The Marchese had planted them to remind him of former days in his old Campagna villa, and they were cut into all manner of odd shapes, partly to please his fancy, but more not to keep out the sun. When you looked at the house from a distance and the light shone on the windows, it made them gleam like water through the dark green mass.” —(How glad Sir Edmund was, that she had said “like water;” another woman would have said “like diamonds,” he thought).—“I did not know my room at Shortlands for a long time. I missed the shadows of the cypresses, which used to nod and sway across the floor at Wisdean always; but now I am accustomed to my farm-house room, though it only looks across the meadows.”

And then Sir Edmund said, half to himself:

*“ ‘Peace in her chamber, wheresoe’er
‘It be, a holy place :
‘The thought still brings my soul such grace
‘As morning meadows wear—’ ”*

“ Yes,” said Eugenia, “ ‘as morning meadows wear.’ I know something of the ‘grace they wear’ after two years at Shortlands. I love to see them in the winter snow or in the summer dew.”

“ Who could not have told it ? ” said Sir Edmund (he had been a little bit spoilt, and so perhaps, despite his shyness, he was readier of speech than other men). “ You will think me such a humbug, because I swear that I find signs in you—your very self—of all those places that you tell me of. But so it is. You have lived among your cypresses by the sea, and you have got the tree’s straightness and strength, and the sea’s music and power ; and you have walked ‘amid the bracken,’ like a fawn, and looked out upon the meadows ”——

“ Like a cow ! ” said Eugenia, with an amused look which recalled him to himself.

"Yes ; *like a cow*," he said, insisting laughingly upon the paradox, "it doesn't sound so nice as it is, but it is very nice."

"I know what you mean," she said, laughing too, "and I think I like to be like a cow."

"But I was going to find beautifuller traces than these," he said. "I was going to tell you that you had the grey sea's colours in your eyes, and the autumn bracken's in your hair, and the grace of the morning meadows in your soul—oh ! but I am sure there must have been pines at Wisdean or at Shortlands."

"There are more pines near here than at Shortlands," said Eugenia. She began to be tired of similes. Then she rubbed one of the steamy panes in the glass door with her leathern gloves and looked out. "See that belt of pines down there," she said. "I think they must go straight on to the sea."

"I wish we could get out," said Sir Edmund

looking through the pane too: he would not break the mystery of this intimate happiness by looking at Eugenia, as they stood there, with but one wish between them, like two children: "we will go walks together, won't we?"

"If you like," said Eugenia, as forgetful of his lameness as he was himself. She spoke as if she were thinking of something else, and so she was. She was thinking of the pines going straight to the sea, and wondering if they looked at all like the King's Forest at Pisa, where she remembered playing when she was quite a little girl.

"Do you know Italy as well as its history?" said Sir Edmund presently.

Then for the first time she thrilled with pleasure.

"Oh," she said, "you were thinking of the King's Forest—Shelley's forest—and of how one comes straight through the pines down to the wonderful broad sea."

"Yes," Sir Edmund said, and his voice trembled a little. "I was thinking your thoughts." And then he looked at her.

She blushed and walked on further through the flowers.

Even Mrs. Tomlinson's conservatories do not go on for ever, and at last it came to pass that Eugenia had to turn. The slight flush that Sir Edmund's speech had roused was not quite faded from her face as she fronted him.

To her relief she fronted at the same time Mr. Vane and James Chatteris, whom a glimpse of her face at the locked door had prevented from accompanying Mr. Tomlinson's "model-cottage-investigating party," as Vane called it, beyond the garden. The door where Eugenia and Sir Edmund had been standing was locked from the outside, and the key was in the lock. The two friends entered the conservatory at its angle and freed the prisoned pair, for they left the glass door open.

Mr. Vane looked older in the broad light, just as Sir Edmund looked more ill, and Eugenia more noble and fair. Standing there thus together, under the articulating sun, they felt all to have made a stride in intimacy, though at the same time to be more critical and more embarrassed. Mr. Vane, for instance, was hardly likely to be reassured with Eugenia, though her eyelashes were longer than he had thought, by the conviction that she could detect the dye upon his whiskers. But embarrassment would have been the wrong term for his feeling; what he felt was that the sun was behaving in an ill-judged way.

“We saw you beating your wings against the door,” he said, “and came to the rescue.”

“The air is delightful,” said Sir Edmund, “but the draught will spoil Mrs. Tomlinson’s orchids.” Sir Edmund was often thoughtful for others out of their presence.

“Had you not better put on your hat, Miss

Brand?" Mr. Vane went on, with some intention in his tone.

"And oh! come out," added the young poet with childish persuasion.

Eugenia quietly put on her hat, which, indeed, she had forgotten; but she returned Mr. Vane no thanks for being so solicitous. "I will come out if you like," she said to James Chatteris, and they walked from the conservatory side by side, Sir Edmund following with Mr. Vane.

Anne and May were at Anne's bay-window above, in the room where the piano had been placed.

"There goes that woman in her mushroom hat," said Anne, "with three men trailing after her already, two, at least, of whom she has never set eyes on till to-day, to our certain knowledge."

"She looks like one of those draped statues on your terrace at Broome, Anne," said May.

“Does she?” said Anne caustically, turning away from the window as she spoke, with a curious sigh; “She’s rather thick in the waist, I grant you.”

“What, don’t you like her? Don’t you think her lovely?” said May, astonished at her cousin’s trenchant comments.

“Like her?” repeated Anne; “think her lovely? I’ll tell you what it is, May. It’s a *plant* and a *sell*, and we’re not going to enjoy ourselves a bit. She’s a right-down beautiful woman, beautiful from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot, and she’s as good as she is beautiful. And if you want to know the truth, I don’t mind telling you, and it’s this: Sir Edmund Trefusis is head over ears in love with her by now, and Mrs. Tomlinson and I—not to speak of your dear mamma—we *loathe* her!”

Which, like most of Anne’s confidences, was only partly true.

CHAPTER IV.

DEVILISH.

MR. VANE always said of Lady Shortlands that she was "the wickedest woman between the three seas." His meaning was as vague as his geography; he could no more have told you any positive crimes of her commission than he could have named the three seas that bounded them. But the verdict that he formulated thus, was—under one formula and another—the current verdict, and passed for true.

She had suffered a good deal of pain, caused certainly by braving London fogs for the sake of theatres, and overeating herself for the sake of gluttony, but still honest

gout and bronchitis that had left her with a real feeling of sympathy for other invalids. But she balanced her compassion for the body by an equal spite against the soul. Against the spiritual part of man she waged incessant war. She might have been a fallen angel, judging from her persistent denial and defiance of good. Without ever having compromised herself—for the world confessed her to be a model wife and mother, viewed by the world's own standard—there was no enormity whispered of others that she did not relish, and was not prepared to believe. "Not that she wished any one ill," she would say; but her craving for exciting incident was such that she would have given a sister the last little push downhill, for the sake of holding up her hands at her fall.

It was half a pity that Lady Shortlands was so truthful. She would have made a most amusing Scheherazade, could one only have

disbelieved her. But she would never proceed without *data*, and if her righteous anger or her Christian pity were wasted on your news, you were no better than a false informant. "You may rely upon me for the truth," was her favourite self-recommendation, and as there are more than enough seams in the social cloak for an old woman to spend her life in unpicking, Lady Shortlands always had her little legitimate handful of unravelled threads to show you, and her series of peepholes to exhibit, through the slits of her own making. And through these peepholes, may be, indeed, you always saw "the truth," but then you always looked at the mud, and if you always look at the mud you will very seldom and very faintly see so much as the reflection of the stars, so that at last you will get to disbelieve in stars and think small beer of astronomers.

Lady Shortlands was very fond of Mr. Vane, though she was not deceived about him, and

she meant to dine down at Ashbank, if it were only for the sake of his gossip ; but previously she had to interview Mrs. Tomlinson to see what was on the cards, and to publish her own opinion about her niece Eugenia ; for Lady Shortlands was particularly exacting where her own flesh and blood were concerned, and particularly confidential about their shortcomings.

She had established herself in the Venetian sitting-room, she was lying on a sofa with her back to the window, looking like a battered Emperor-butterfly, with all the bloom off its wings, and upbraiding her maid and her absent niece, with what breath she had left.

“ Object ! ” she was saying ; “ why, the creature won’t be fit to be seen, if she meanders and philanders about those cucumber frames, with the dust of the road in her hair and the railway smuts smudged on her nose.”

It is difficult to say "smuts smudged" when one is lying on one's back; and the phonetic exercise had just set Lady Shortlands sneezing, when Mrs. Tomlinson knocked at the door, followed by her own maid, with some tea upon a tray.

"Dearest Lady Shortlands!" said the hostess with effusion, "I am *so* glad to see you looking at home already."

"Yes, thank you, Mrs. Tomlinson. I'm comfortable enough, and your rooms are charming; only you must remember, I've the responsibility of bear-leader now, and I'm anxious about my bear. She's a fine creature and tame; but she's very stupid; and Parfitt—who daren't tell me a lie for her life—says she's gone off on her tricks without even staying to powder her nose."

"You mean your niece, Eugenia?" said Mrs. Tomlinson, rather stunned at this tirade, but glad of the opportunity for inserting

Eugenia's name; she had no intention of calling her "Miss Brand."

"Of course I do; what, I ask you, is my motive, Mrs. Tomlinson, in coming here?" (Lady Shortlands was not careful to disguise her schemes, and she was annoyed with Mrs. Tomlinson already). "I mean to marry the woman to your rich dwarf. I bring her all the way here; I'm dead beat; I push her into the room with Milord, and tell her to look sharp and bring me up some tea. What is the point of that? I can trust your servants for the tea; and if I can't—for I never believe in *new* servants—what do I care for tea? I want to get her up here, for Parfitt to give her a good brushing and shaking down before she's seen. No such thing! Off she goes with the first man she claps eyes on—the dwarf of course—and, Parfitt says, without a hat on; Parfitt knows, and she's made out the ironmonger already"——

“Sir Edmund Trefusis is not an ironmonger, dear Lady Shortlands,” said Mrs. Tomlinson, in a tone meant to be mildly deprecating, though her voice shook with anger—not that she was sorry that Lady Shortlands should find fault with Eugenia.

“Ironfounder then, man in irons, whatever he is. I’m sure I’d sooner it was gold than iron; however there’s something in quantity. You know what Lady Kingsborough said when she aimed at the horse-breeder, and her daughter ran off with the groom, ‘It isn’t the stable I mind, but I wanted a great deal more of it,’ and I hear your Sir Edmund’s iron is as good as other people’s gold”——

“Sir Edmund Trefusis has sixty thousand a year,” said Mrs. Tomlinson, slowly, and with something of her husband’s manner, which she unconsciously assumed when making any statement about money.

“Now, *has* he, Mrs. Tomlinson?” inter-

rupted Lady Shortlands, "and are you sure? because, you know very well, rumour counts for nothing with me. I must have it in black and white; I don't say that I should stop the marriage for the difference between sixteen and sixty, in thousands, any more than Lady Elspeth did for her girl in years, but I like to know the truth."

"Mr. Tomlinson says sixty thousand," said his wife with authority.

"Well," assented her ladyship, in a tone more mollified than grateful, "Tomlinson ought to know!"

Mrs. Tomlinson glanced round to see that Parfitt and her own maid had left the room. It galled her that they should hear her husband spoken of as if he were a steward, but, when she saw that they were gone, she summoned up a smile, and said as amicably as she could, that she "thought he did."

"And now," Lady Shortlands went on,

having got the information she wanted, "sit near me, my dear, and tell me all about the people! The girl's beyond our reach, and there's no help for it now. She never looks bad out of doors, that's one comfort. If she's made a slatternly first appearance, Parfitt can freshen her up, and if she's tired herself out, I think *my* tongue can sting her into life. There are certain things that I say, which Eugenia does not like. Odd that? isn't it?"

Mrs. Tomlinson could not express surprise at this announcement, so she affected not to notice it. "The Buxtons are here," she said, "with May; and Anne Jefferies has come with them."

"She's ugly, isn't she?" said Lady Shortlands. "Her father's skin; 'can the leopard,' &c.? Who was it said of money, '*non olet*?' I always say it does—through the pores."

This witticism was thrown away on Mrs.

Tomlinson, who knew no Latin; and she made as if she would have gone on with her list.

“Oh, you needn’t tell *me*,” said Lady Shortlands; “*I’ll* tell *you*. The Buxtons and ourselves—Eugenia, Anne, and May, Sir Edmund Tre—what’s his name?—Vane and a mountebank. You see I know them already. Now, my dear, you want more men: there isn’t a ha’porth of manhood among them. Milord can’t hear a word from any one but Eugenia—why you asked him I don’t know!—; Buxton’s a fool, and Vane’s a daily paper. Sir Edmund and the mountebank don’t count. The one’s a cripple (poor creature!) and I hope *booked*, and the other’s a monkey, I suppose—who is he?”

“Mr. James Chatteris,” said Mrs. Tomlinson, feeling that the name needed no warrant.

“A monkey:” repeated Lady Shortlands, to her hostess’ chagrin; “you must have men,

what I call *fibre*, or your girls will be bored, and your party dull."

"We have the White Highlanders at Portsmouth," said Mrs. Tomlinson, naming that popular regiment. She half anticipated a crushing retort, but Lady Shortlands was tolerant :

"Very well ; ask them over and say you can sleep some of them ; you can easily send them back if they won't do, and it will take a deal of sinew to balance the Buxtons."

"I did not know you knew the Buxtons," said Mrs. Tomlinson, unwisely.

"Not know them ?" said Lady Shortlands, shutting her eyes with a sigh. "I know everybody, for my sins, and a great many nobodies too. You ask Mrs. Buxton whether I know her or not. You might remind her that I caught her out opening my letters with hot water, thirty years ago, at Hepsworth ; but you needn't, if you think it would hurt her

fine feelings," she added with that short laugh which invariably followed her recital of a scandal, like the clock-work squeak of a mechanical toy, as it runs down.

"Did she really?" said Mrs. Tomlinson, not displeased. To a new landowner, such information about "her county" is precious.

"*'Did she really'?*" repeated Lady Shortlands, opening her eyes again very wide indeed. "Yes, Mrs. Tomlinson, she *really* did; when I say people have done things, you may be pretty certain that they *have* done them. I daresay she does it still. You find out if she asks for some hot water—'Very hot, to melt some cement:' she used to say—about half an hour before the post goes; then look for your postbag, and when you hear that she's ordered it to be brought to her room that she may put her letters into it herself, ask me again if *she really does.*"

Mrs. Tomlinson shivered. There was something so enormous and so graphic in Lady Shortlands' strictures, that they gave her quite a chill.

"She reads everything and she does nothing," concluded her ladyship, "and that sort of woman is a perfect sink of iniquity. As to Anne Jefferies, I could tell you something about her, Mrs. Tomlinson, that would make your mouth water ; but I won't, because she'll very likely marry my old friend Torre, and I'm not one to throw mud at a possible peeress. Now, look here, there's nothing of that sort about Eugenia ; she is fond of music, *not of music-masters ;*" (Lady Shortlands said this slowly), "she is not like other girls. You don't think her handsome, I daresay, because she doesn't know what paint is, and doesn't dip her face into the meal-tub or her hair into the mustard-pot, but handsome she is ; and if an eligible baronet—with, say, sixty thousand a

year—wants the genuine woman, *there* she is—*minus* a heart, as far as I can tell—and she shan't say 'no,' for a twist in his leg or a turn in his temper. Now, you manage this for me, like the dear creature that you are, and don't forget to bring Tomlinson to Shortlands at Christmas, and meet the Durhams!"

"Has Eugenia never cared for any one?" said Mrs. Tomlinson, too wily to express her delight at the contingent invitation that might put her on terms of intimacy with a Duchess, though she could not disguise a certain glisten in her eye.

—"She's improving," thought Lady Shortlands: "she'd have jumped at that, six months ago:" but she only said, "Never! It's an odd thing, but I'm sure of it. When the caring does come, it will come with a rush, and over she'll go. It's the way with us Carruthers."—Lady Shortlands was quite still for an instant,

and then she went on:—"I want to get her married first, or she'll fall in love with some wicked old astronomer, like Corafume; she's educated and cut out for a martyr, and I mean to baulk her of that vocation at least. If she must make a sacrifice of herself, let her do so to your dwarf!" And Lady Shortlands squeaked again, while Mrs. Tomlinson gave symptoms of her characteristic snort.

"A pretty sacrifice, I think," she said angrily.

"My niece?" said Lady Shortlands, delighted to have put her hostess into a temper which she did not dare to show: "A *very* pretty sacrifice; tell me, my dear Emma, what will you wear at the wedding?"

"Brown:" said Mrs. Tomlinson, appeased. Though she disliked her Christian name, it was sweet to hear it from Lady Shortlands' lips. "Do you know Mr. Buxton well?" she asked, changing the subject.

“Mr. Buxton,” said Lady Shortlands, closing her eyes again as if to look into her memory, “proposed to me three times. So I ought to know him well, but I don’t suppose I do, for I should never have given him credit, after so much persistency, for yielding to Miss Dalrymple-Robarts. Either he was a greater fool than he seemed, or else my reiterated refusal turned his brain. They have scores of children, I suppose; I hope you have only asked the one, sisters whisper so in corners and are the scourge of a party.”

“Only May,” said Mrs. Tomlinson, “she is my husband’s favourite.”

“Oh! I can see her; bread and butter, blush and smile, ‘yes’ and ‘no’—or rather always ‘yes!’ She will do for the captains, *all of them desirable young men riding upon horses*;”—Lady Shortlands knew parts of her Bible well.—“I appropriate Vane, and I daresay Anne

Jefferies will teach the monkey something ; is it musical ? ”

“ No, it’s a poet,—Mr. Chatteris is,” said Mrs. Tomlinson vaguely.

“ James Chatteris a poet ? ” said Lady Shortlands. “ What a mistake of Vane’s to bring him here—poor boy ! I must kiss him, if he’s presentable, for his mother’s sake. What a martyr she was to gumboils, and how my Friars’ balsam cured them ; poor soul, I wonder if she has them now ? ”

“ I wish you would give me something for Mr. Tomlinson’s knee,” said Mrs. Tomlinson, immolating her absent husband, in her joy at getting Lady Shortlands mounted on her pet hobby of medicine ; “ he has suffered terribly from the season’s dinners.”

“ I *will* give you something,” said Lady Shortlands, sitting bolt upright for the first time, and drawing some small tablets from her pocket. “ Tomlinson’s knee ! where’s a spare

place for it? Here, just look at my *memoranda* from the journey! A woman in the carriage with us let out that she was Marian Dorcaster's governess. I've put down, '*Write to Lady Marian,*' I shall have that woman sent away, people shouldn't talk of their employers' concerns. She said nothing of consequence, but she might have said a great deal, *and I shall not tell Marian that she didn't!* Then what's this—'*79 Hans Place.*' Oh! that was on a travelling bag; I must find out who's—'*Chetwynd, what Chetwynd?*' That was a man sat opposite to me, and read a letter dated from 'Brooks's.' I didn't know the man, and I know every Chetwynd under the sun. The letter began, 'My dear Chetwynd.' He must have been an impostor. Here's a place, '*Liniment—knee—Tomlinson*'—that means I must have Parfitt make a liniment for Mr. Tomlinson's knee,—underline *knee*, that means that I must *see* it."—Mrs. Tomlinson looked

shocked — “Nonsense, my dear, I *must* see Tomlinson’s knee.”

Some one laughed in the room. She had come in without noise.

“It is I, Aunt Agatha,” said Eugenia. “I have had such a lovely walk ; but may I come in ? I don’t want to trespass upon Mr. Tomlinson’s knee,” she added with an amused look at Mrs. Tomlinson.

(“She is an odious girl,” thought that lady, “she speaks to me as if I were a child.”)

“Good !” said old Lady Shortlands, squeaking again ; “*trespass upon Tomlinson’s knee !* I daresay Tomlinson wouldn’t mind it if you did. Yes, come in ; where have you been ?”

“In the conservatories and in the garden : the air is delicious after travelling.”

“Who was with you ?”

“Sir Edmund Trefusis, and Mr. Henry Vane, and young Mr. Chatteris, the poet.”

(“She hasn’t fallen in love with him,” thought her ladyship, “else she’d either have put his name last—for effect,—or in the middle,—that I shouldn’t notice it!”)

“How do you like Sir Edmund?” said Mrs. Tomlinson, with the arch glance which Eugenia had resented already.

“I am very sorry for him,” she answered; “he seems so lame.”

“He has sixty thousand a year,” put in Lady Shortlands.

“Has he?” said Eugenia in an absent manner.—“Affectation,” thought Mrs. Tomlinson, until she went on quietly, “I wonder what it is like to have so much money at one’s command, and at the same time to be always ill and see the poorer people well, about one. Life must become so full of irony.”

“Full of iron-foundry,” squeaked Lady Shortlands impatiently; and then she pulled herself up short as she remembered that it was

to Eugenia, and not to Mrs. Tomlinson, that she was talking; "Think of the opportunities for good that such an income brings!"

—To hear Lady Shortlands' counsel upon 'opportunities for good' was like hearing the devil quote Scripture.—

"It is kind of you to think of that, Aunt Agatha," said Eugenia, trying to repress her instinct that the speech was insincere. As she could not repress it, however, she said no more upon the subject. "What beautiful things you have at Ashbank, Mrs. Tomlinson!"

"Oh, nothing much," said Mrs. Tomlinson, fingering an exquisite Cellini cup, upon the writing-table, as if it were a trifle of no moment; "A few pretty little things."

Eugenia reached out her hand for the cup,—she had seated herself on a footstool by Lady Shortlands' sofa. Mrs. Tomlinson handed it to her carelessly, but she took it with reverent hands.

“That is most beautiful,” she said, looking at it with intense pleasure.

“Have you seen your room?” said Mrs. Tomlinson, perceiving that it was herself and not the cup that she had depreciated—and she could have melted down the gold with the heat of her own indignation—“I think you will like it.”

“Am I not to sleep there?” said Eugenia, turning towards the dressing-room.

“No, in the room beyond this; it is—ah!—*warmer* :” (a doubtful recommendation in August) “You will be close to Lady Shortlands without disturbing her,” she added.

“I shall be happy anywhere,” said Eugenia with her smile, proud and yet gracious.

Lady Shortlands marked the effect of her voice on Mrs. Tomlinson, who seemed collapsing more and more into the position of house-keeper to Ashbank; and her heart, withered as it was, swelled at Eugenia’s bearing. She

liked, too, the unconscious change of tone with which her niece addressed herself, the tone of one who speaks to an equal and with no shade of patronage.

“Mr. Chatteris has been finding out that he is my cousin, Aunt Agatha,” she said.

“So he is!” said Lady Shortlands, interested at once. “At least your poor father was a sort of cousin of his mother’s. They say the world is small. I don’t know that, but everybody seems related to one somehow.”

Mrs. Tomlinson said nothing; but she had an uncomfortable feeling that neither the Jubbers nor the Tomlinsons were likely to prove related to Eugenia Brand.

—“Yes,” Lady Shortlands went on, “Lady Shetney was a Brand, and she was Jem’s grandmother—*Brandmother* I might say,” she added with her squeak. Her ladyship liked any pun, however poor, if she had made it her-

self. If it were made by another, she only liked it if it was irreligious or indecent.

Mrs. Tomlinson smiled. "I hope you will like Anne and May;" she said to Eugenia.

"I have no doubt of it;" said Eugenia.—She had not paid much attention to either, and that was why she spoke without enthusiasm, but Mrs. Tomlinson set her down as cold and jealous.—"And I am quite sure I shall like Sir Edmund."

Lady Shortlands squeaked again, and Mrs. Tomlinson suppressed a snort.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I am certain of that! We dine soon after eight, so I shall leave you with your aunt till then. If you are inclined to come downstairs you know your way, and this is Liberty Hall. I hope dearest Lady Shortlands will dine down too. Your room, Miss Brand,"—she had meant to say "Eugenia," but she did not—"is the last door on the left as you go towards the staircase."

“Thank you very much,” said Eugenia, gracefully rising, as Mrs. Tomlinson rose, and going with her towards the corridor. “I shall write my few lines to mamma here, if Aunt Agatha will let me.”

Mrs. Tomlinson drifted off, with her inconsequent gait, and Eugenia walked back to the writing-table, Lady Shortlands watching her the while under half-closed eyelids as she gasped for breath.

“Put me some brandy in that tea,” she said presently. “The old cat has clawed me to pieces.”

Eugenia got some brandy from her aunt’s travelling-bag and poured it into the tea. Then she sat down at the writing-table; but all the time she was silent.

There are some few people in the world whom to watch doing things is perfect rest. Eugenia was one of these people. There was no hurry or fatigue in what she did. To see

her write a letter was just to see a beautiful creature duly exercising certain mental and bodily faculties with use as refreshing as food. As Lady Shortlands watched her, the faintness passed. "Give her my love," she said presently, "and tell her my pun." Then, querulously, after a pause,—“Are you never tired, Eugenia?”

“Not with sitting still in the train,” Eugenia answered: “I was cramped, but my walk has freshened me.”

She folded up her letter as she spoke.

This was Eugenia's letter:—

“MY OWN DEAR MOTHER—

“You have just finished your tea, and I
“know perfectly well what you are doing. You
“are sitting down to write me a real, long letter!
“That is good, for I feel that more than half of
“me is with you; the other half has little news
“as yet. Ashbank is beautiful, but there are
“many ugly things in it; so many antimacassars.

“ Mr. and Mrs. Buxton are here, with a
“ daughter, who is pretty: they have also
“ brought a niece, Miss Jefferies. Then there
“ are Sir Edmund Trefusis, and H. Vane. The
“ former is almost a cripple; the latter you
“ know. Also a Mr. James Chatteris, whose
“ poems you will find in my bedroom, he is
“ very clever and he is my cousin!

“ Mr. and Mrs. Tomlinson seem kind.

“ Aunt Agatha is on the sofa, in a pretty
“ sitting-room she is to have, where I am writ-
“ ing. She looks very tired; but I am glad to
“ see she is not pale. Lord Shortlands bore
“ the journey very well, and has gone out; I
“ have been out too. There is a belt of
“ pines here which you can see from the house-
“ conservatories, which are very large. It
“ goes straight down to the sea, and reminds
“ me so much of the King’s Forest at Pisa: you
“ will recollect those pines. I did so wish for
“ you when I noticed this. Sir Edmund said

“ the view reminded him of the same place,
“ just as I was thinking how like it was. That
“ was nice of him, was it not? And it proves
“ the resemblance, for he has travelled a great
“ deal. It made me think of Wisdean too, and
“ the dear Marchese’s trees—but he could not
“ know that.

“ After all, I left behind the little jewel-case
“ you lent me. I put it in my left-hand drawer
“ to be safe, and then forgot all about it! You
“ will find it there, but you need not forward it.
“ It does not matter in the least: I am sure
“ there are plenty of trinkets here without mine
“ or yours, and I can easily get flowers.

“ Good-bye, dearest mother, kiss the pony
“ for me, if you can get as far as the stable, and
“ don’t let Kafoozelum forget how to say grace
“ for her milk. Your loving daughter—

“ EUGENIA BRAND.”

“ Aunt Agatha sends you her love and bids

“ me tell you a pun she made. She called Mr. “ James Chatteris’ grandmother his *Brand-* “ mother. (She was a Miss Brand.) ”

That was Eugenia’s letter ; neither very wise nor very witty ; but faithful, as a letter seldom is. Mrs. Brand would certainly not stop to question of its wisdom or its wit ; it was “ Eugenia’s letter ; ” and if Mrs. Buxton did practise on the post-bag, as Lady Shortlands averred, she could get no scandal out of it.

“ And now, Eugenia,” said Lady Shortlands when the letter was put aside, “ as Milord is out of the way, and we can talk without your having to shout it all to him, I want to speak to you.”

“ Yes, Aunt Agatha,” said Eugenia ; she shut the blotting-book and leaned forward over the writing-table, fronting the light.

“ You are eight-and-twenty, *sonnés*.”

“ Quite an old woman ! ”

“Quite a woman at all events, and I hope not a fool. Now I want you to listen and not to interrupt me: you know I have no breath to waste. You are no longer young, and you have no fortune; but I have made up my mind that you shall have your chance. It is not so much for your sake as for my poor dear sister’s, that I want you to marry well.”

Eugenia looked down at her hands, and her lip curled a little; “Is that why you have brought me here?” she said.

“Partly—and partly because I am not strong, and want your company. I am not likely to find a single *âme de connaissance* here. But I do not disguise that I wish you to place yourself well. Now, Eugenia, I don’t know who may come here or who may not;”—this was a lie and Eugenia knew it—“but I want you to bear the idea of marriage in mind (that sacrament seems to have slipped your notice hitherto) and not to neglect an eligible oppor-

tunity (really eligible, mind, don't jump at straws) of providing for *your mother*"—"I think I had her there," she added to herself, unsnapping her eyes and looking at Eugenia's troubled face. "Now for a scene!").

But no scene came. Eugenia was silent for a few seconds, and then she said, "I see; do you think marriage *is* a sacrament, Aunt Agatha?"

—Now what in the world could be more provoking than this?—

"I'm sure I don't know," said Lady Shortlands, entirely nonplussed, as people are apt to be when an incidental clause in their advice is combated, instead of the main issue; "wiser heads than mine or yours have thought so."

"'A sacrament,'" said Eugenia, half seriously and half in banter, as she clasped her beautiful hands round the Cellini cup, "'is an outward and visible sign'"——

“ ‘Of an inward and spiritual grace,’ ” said Lady Shortlands briskly, snapping - to her eyes again, and glancing deep into the various stores of her memory. “Put down that chalice—cup, I mean, and don’t preach to me; I know all about it.”

Eugenia dropped the quotation, but she said what she meant to say. “I don’t see how one can make a *right* marriage, *because* one is old and poor.”

“I never said you could,” said Lady Shortlands, “but I think you may as well try:—what I say to you is simple enough; I say ‘don’t be rude.’ Your manner to men is unpleasant, you hurt their self-respect, and some day you will hurt your own.”

“I am sorry if I am rude,” said Eugenia, with a slight consciousness that she had hurt Sir Edmund’s pride. “I have not had much to do with men who require gentleness, and

I am afraid that I am rough. I must try to mend my ways."

She said this owing to the direction her thoughts had taken, of which her speech was always a truthful reflex. She did not mean to yield; but Lady Shortlands unsnapped her eyes again, and jumped for joy upon her sofa. "The creature absolutely takes my drift," she said to herself, "she's not such a goose as I thought."

And with that she determined to say no more, but dismissed Eugenia to her room.

Now Eugenia's sense of beauty was even keener than Mrs. Tomlinson had surmised, and when she entered her chamber, its storied walls all golden in the late afternoon glow, she experienced a feeling of delight which would have amply repaid a hostess who had been actuated by any wish to please her guest. Although she had truly said that she was not tired, the quiet and the warmth

inclined her to repose. She sat down in an old-fashioned chair by the window, which had a seat that sloped backwards, and enjoyed the prospect before her, indoors and out. She was in a disturbed state of mind, unusual for her, caused partly by her having suddenly been thrown among strangers, and partly by her aunt's hard speeches. She could not have told you quite what her thoughts were; but presently they formulated themselves into the words, "I should like to be independent," a wish which Lady Shortlands, had she heard it, would have taken as a good omen for the sacrament she had ordained. She looked at the lavish wealth of beauty round her, and thought, without a grain of envy, of Mrs. Tomlinson's power; "It is well to be rich!"

She sat for some minutes without stirring, but presently, as she rose to survey the room, she beheld on the wall opposite the window a most curious and magnetic picture, which

struck her, on the instant, as the glory of the whole. The picture was raised, upon an old receding frame of brass, and ivory, and silver,—a miracle of workmanship—and it represented a woman darkly dressed, stooping forward a little from against a sunset scene. Behind her you could see stretch beyond stretch of pleasaunce and still water, vivid in tone, and yet, Eugenia thought, quite unpicturesque in its crowding, as it were the background of a Dürer etching, coloured by Holman Hunt, crimson and purple and green. There was something in the woman's *pose* so noble, something so natural and winning in her figure and the attentive way she stood, that Eugenia felt she must advance and examine the subject nearer. As she did so, the sloping image made her a sort of sudden bow and disappeared, leaving the crowded landscape a still wider field! It had been her own reflection, the strong sunset light behind her

making the grey of her gown and the tints of her face darker, in one of the old Venice mirrors hung upon the warrior tapestry, and leaning forward from the wall.

The momentary vision and its sudden loss gave Eugenia an odd sense of loneliness, which she tried vainly to dispel by an examination of the tapestry. It was more comely than edifying, and she turned again to the window.

When she looked out, she saw Anne Jefferies and May Buxton, in pretty tennis dresses, standing grouped with Mr. Vane and James Chatteris, in the gravel court, where they were going to play, to avoid the heavy dews upon the lawn.

Lady Shortlands looked out on to the same prospect, shortly afterwards, from her bedroom, three windows off, and to her satisfaction she beheld Eugenia, "with her face clean and her hair tidy," crossing the grass towards the

tennis grounds, quite unaware that the basket-seat which two footmen were bringing out to set upon the terrace, was one specially designed for the comfort of Sir Edmund Trefusis.

“Parfitt,” said her ladyship to her maid, who entered the room just then, to help her dress for dinner, “you needn’t give me that tonic before I go down to-night; I feel quite set up without it! Pour it, with those other things, into a bottle you will find upon that table near the window, labelled ‘*The Liment, for Mr. Tomlinson’s knee—Poison—with care.*’ And much good may it do him!”

CHAPTER V.

SENSUOUS.

THERE were some people called Jarvis, who lived at Clifton, with whom the worthies of this story could never have had anything to do, seeing that they were quite outside the boundary line which society draws, however vaguely, and never made an effort to pass it but by one proxy.

Mr. Vane might indeed have recognised the Jarvis' existence, had he been some days with them in a desert, because their appearance connoted good living, and he would have trusted them to direct him to an oasis; but he would have heard their name mentioned over and over again, in a civilised land, and not have

given any sign of consciousness. They were substantial "Villa" people, with a three-stall stable close to their Villa, and a loud seven o'clock dinner-bell which rang from a mock tower and was more audible on the near road than in the drawing-room. But for the carriage and the horses and the loud dinner-bell, you might have lived unaware of Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis, though you would have seen their names, on local charity lists, before such good round sums as made you wonder that you never heard of them. They were so very like so very many other people! They were not very vulgar, nor very rich; they were prosperous folk, and in their own set popular. But then it was a planetary set that revolved on its own axis, and its satellites were insignificant. The people who belonged to it were always "at home" and always "quite well," so that one could not glean interest, even from ups and downs of their whereabouts or their health.

For crown of their prosperity, Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis had one son, baptismally recorded as "Arthur John" though not a scion of the earlier princes of England. He was called Arthur because, straight upon her confinement, Mrs. Jarvis brought to the birth her sole moment of romance, and insisted with tears—"of weakness," the doctor said—upon "a name out of a novel," for her crimson hopeful. The Waverley Novels were the only ones to hand, good Mr. Jarvis having bought them with the decorations of the house. Some of them were real books and some were only backs fastened on to the library door. Mr. Jarvis did not know which were books and which were backs; the presence of the backs had accounted for his purchase of the books. "Anne of Geierstein" was, however, it transpired, a *bonâ fide* book and not a back. Mr. Jarvis raked out "Anne of Geierstein," and sent it up to his wife's room,

with strict injunctions that she was not to read it.

She did not read it, but it served its turn; she opened it, and lighted on the name of "Arthur." Mr. Jarvis thought it an absurd name, but he humoured her so far as to let it stand before his own plain work-a-day name of John; and thus the only child that was their portion became "Arthur John," and like the other Jarvis *impedimenta*, he prospered.

But, prosper though he did, Arthur John, as might be surmised from the parts whereof he was compounded, was not more brilliant than most other people's sons. He was a perfectly healthy and a perfectly stupid boy, whose stomach could stand cigars before his brain could digest Latin. Whether from difficulty of choice between two royal names so eligible, or from shame at the spasm of romance implied in "Arthur" while there was a prior parental claim to "John," he was

always called by a nickname—"Buck," to wit; suggested by his partiality to some American buckwheat cakes, which were sent annually to his mother from emigrated relatives in Ohio, during the years of his hungry boyhood.

Perhaps he would have grown up a nicer young man if he had occasionally been bullied and flogged. As it was, though he was packed off to school directly he had kicked his governess, he grew up a bit of a bully himself; and, had he cared to put his creed into words, it would, perhaps, have been found to be this, that you can have all you want in the world, provided you make up your mind to get it, and shout for it until you do: which is no doubt true, provided it is only rocking-horses and toffee that you go on wanting, in divers forms, all your life long.

Arthur John Jarvis—*alias* Buck—was sent to Harrow, and thence, after unpropitious experiences of a vulgar sort, to a crammer's; for he

had expressed a very decided predilection for a red coat, and his youthful misdemeanours were not such as need disqualify him for a military career, though they might have been considered to his disadvantage had he selected the Church as the profession he wished to adorn. Good fortune and the single-heartedness of his parents, who would have made every effort to get him the moon had he wanted it (—but he did not want it, and would not have known what to do with it if he had got it—) made his career easy; and when he first honoured Portsmouth with his lordly presence, he was a lieutenant in the regiment of which Mrs. Tomlinson had spoken, by its usual and historic title, as the “White Highlanders.”

In person, Mr. Buck Jarvis was very like a private in the footguards, being noticeably free from any distinguishing refinement of appearance or manner. Though you could not perhaps have made certain that he was a gentle-

man, there was no doubt whatever of his being a soldier. That was what admitted him at all. As a civilian he would have been impossible, but even as it was, he looked more like a soldier-servant than an officer.

He was not quite six feet high, though, by brushing his thick curly hair a little upwards, he managed to attain the air of this ideal standard. His mother called the said hair auburn, and his face was florid too. It was rather a handsome face of the common soldierly type, unchanging in complexion and aspect under all circumstances and in all weather. No doubt his figure, though he had some work to keep it down, was magnificent, but it was incapable of grace or of the slightest dramatic expression. If he put himself into any conscious attitude, beyond standing or sitting, he looked at once like a vulgar caricature. His ample frame would not be "cabined," whether his "ample spirit" would, or no. There was some-

thing about his lips and hands—the way he breathed and the way he spread himself—that made you feel he was a young man who required room. He seemed to exhaust the air in which he moved; a winter arbour that he had sat in was well-aired, and the ice cracked as he passed over it. He did not say much, but what he said he said loudly, as if he meant it, and, as it was generally a demand for something good, he mostly did mean it. The veins showed in his hands, and his clothes accentuated his muscles—he always wore regulation boots. When he was off duty, what he liked best was shooting rabbits.

No one in the regiment ever called him anything but Buck, but when he spoke of himself in the third person, as he sometimes did, it was by the more affectionate pet-name of “Buckieboy.”

Men seldom found anything to say about him; and when they did, their praise or blame

was for the most part negative—for instance, that he was “not a bad sort of chap,” and that he would “not set the Thames on fire”—what he *was* and what he *would* do, it would have required discrimination to tell. For purposes of his own amusement, he was lavish of his father’s money; and he was not the least bit of a bore, for so long as he got what *he* wanted, you might get what *you* wanted for all that he cared. Girls talked about him a good deal, and though they professed to laugh at him, they liked to be with him. No “really nice woman,” as Mrs. Tomlinson would have said, “had ever troubled her head about him,” but the middle-class maidens at Clifton thought him “jolly,” and the housemaids at his father’s villa, who always put new ribbons in their caps when Mr. Arthur was expected home, considered him a very fine young man indeed. He always tipped them, and after meeting him upon the stairs they had been

known to spend whole afternoons in quarrelling for the possession of his buttonhole flower of the previous evening, the vanquished one even refusing the solace of tea—a proof that his favours had been fairly distributed.

Of such flesh and blood was Mr. Arthur John Jarvis at four-and-twenty, of whom perhaps too much has been said already, to the exclusion of describing other officers of his regiment, but, in a word, it is upon the red head of Mr. Buck Jarvis that the halo centres!

One is too apt to confound cause with circumstance; it is often not because a man *is* this or the other that he gets the greater boons of life, but just because he happens to be there when the greater boons are going-a-begging. The lot falls upon him. Now and then it makes him worthier, but for the most part it leaves him pretty much where he was. The greatest gift seems small if one have not wrought for it.

Now Mr. Jarvis, being always "fit" for tennis and much inclined for the good things of this life, was one of the readiest of his regiment to accept that invitation of Mrs. Tomlinson's which Jebb conveyed to Portsmouth, while Eugenia was writing to her mother on the afternoon of her arrival at Ashbank. He at once proposed to drive over two friends of his, Captain Boville and Lieutenant Crossley, in his new cart; and he and Crossley went next morning and bought more scarves and ties than they would be likely to need for a month's sojourn. The scarves were not selected by the canons of æstheticism, they were bright and fresh; Buck called them "rather classy." Captain Boville, who was twelve years older and impecunious, bought no scarves and called Buck a fool to his face, though he accepted his lift. The three men had leave to sleep if asked, and brought their dressing-bags with them, and Crossley, who was musical, took two songs,

“In the gloaming” and the “Midshipmite,” which Boville made a feint of accompanying and Buck whistled, though he was apt to swear, with adjectives, that they were “rot.”

The party at Ashbank had coalesced and amalgamated surprisingly during the twenty-four hours that elapsed before the advent of the military contingent. Lord Shortlands had not only approved of the model cottages but made the delightful discovery that he could hear what Anne Jefferies said to him. Lady Shortlands had kissed Mrs. Buxton (averring it was true that “she was so changed she should *never* have known her”) and patted May upon the head, for she was in high good humour after her talk with Eugenia. Mr. Buxton, some of whose suggestions had been put under consideration by Mr. Tomlinson’s surveyor, thought Tomlinson vicariously “a very good fellow.” Vane and Anne were the better friends for having beaten May Bux-

ton and James Chatteris at their tennis, and Mrs. Tomlinson, assured that her party would be a success, spoke with more command than usual to her footmen.

And Sir Edmund Trefusis—and Eugenia?

They had sat side by side and watched the tennis, taking up the thread of their talk unlike strangers, hindered only—if it were not encouraged—by Mrs. Tomlinson's wandering visits to their terrace, (for both she and Mrs. Buxton were "too much afraid of the falling dew," to sit with them)—and what little each had said had approved itself to the other's taste. Such conversation is hard to register, it is so slight as to escape the most scrutinous memory, but much is built upon it: and it is well if one feel, the following day, that there is none of it which one would wish unsaid.

Eugenia certainly wished no word of Sir Edmund's unsaid, at present; the manner,

rather than the matter, of his speech, had pleased her, and she had said so very little herself that there was nothing to need repentance. Eugenia liked watching tennis, although she was herself an exceptional player, and she liked sitting out in the warm sunset glow. She began to feel at home at Ashbank, making, as she soon did, a sort of circle of calm around her; the place had sufficient charm in its immemorial beauty to let you forget that it was not its own hostess.

As for Sir Edmund, he continued to wonder that he had ever thought Mrs. Tomlinson's parties complete before. He longed, in his sweet-natured random way, to buy Ashbank and give it to Eugenia that he might be able to thank *her* for his enjoyment there. Sir Edmund had "the grace to give thanks," and his position in life was anomalous. For with this exceptionally grateful heart, it was always his lot to be receiving thanks, instead of giving

them; and thus, as it was out of his power to be grateful to others for what are accounted the chief gifts of the world, he was almost unduly susceptible to the value of small ones.

In this case, he was disposed to be thankful that a beautiful woman like Eugenia should listen to him kindly.

And Eugenia had a gracious way with her that did not dispel this view. She was as free from all mean self-seeking as Sir Edmund himself, and it was really a favour on her part to sit there with him in the garden quiet. Even Lady Shortlands, whose trenchant way of putting things always doubled their incisiveness, could not have allowed to her own self that Eugenia was "making up to him." Still she was pleased, as we know, to have seen them together; and at dinner, later on, she liked to notice that Sir Edmund stooped forwards sometimes over the round table to look at Eugenia, who was unfortunately placed

on the same side with him. May Buxton and James Chatteris intervened, while Anne and Mr. Vane were opposite. Mr. Vane was on Lady Shortlands' right hand, and she took him into her confidence a little—it being her principle to confide her schemes to people who were likely to find them out, that she might be beforehand in imposing secrecy.

The following day was of a still riper summer beauty: the sky was cloudless, and there was so little stir in the air that Mrs. Tomlinson had a raised plateau of her garden, on which stood several cedars, furnished with sofas, chairs, and writing-tables, the journals and materials on which were not even rustled by the breeze. Cedars were a distinctive beauty of Ashbank, and Sir Edmund had christened the sunburnt lawn which they enclosed and overspread, “the cedar drawing-room.” Its turf was more dry and springy than any carpet, and, being strewn with the

fine needles of the firs, it made the atmosphere rarely fragrant and exhilarating. The whole party were assembled here for tea—after a morning of varied exploration—when the military contingent was let in upon them, Captain Boville being the bearer of a note from his Colonel to accept for the rest of the officers Mrs. Tomlinson's invitation to her dance the following evening.

Lieutenants Crossley and Jarvis, albeit no cowards, were a trifle shy. They felt indeed shyer than they had meant to feel, just as perhaps under those noble trees the group looked more distinguished than it really was. The company had been for some time listening to music—for Anne Jefferies had brought a kind of zither—and the expression on the faces of an audience, as the old French painters well knew, is always elevated if sometimes fatigued. Mr. and Mrs. Buxton were asleep, the one corporeally and the other mentally,

so that their faces wore a staid repose. Sir Edmund's happy features were quite calm, and Eugenia's light brown hair, in the same glint of sunshine which was transfiguring Lady Shortlands' *postiche*, looked gravely virginal and classic. At this eventful hour, she wore nothing more decorative than a plain white dress, simpler than May Buxton's was and of the same thin material—but "with a difference." All the ladies but Anne, who was still playing, were busied with some handiwork or other, and Eugenia had been doing patchwork. It lay on the ground, in front of her, and made a bright foreground, for she had let it fall while she listened to the music which brought her childish memories of far-off lands.

She sat with her hands idly clasped in her lap.

Anne was a very thorough musician, and besides the Rhine melodies and such Italian *canti popolari* as form the stock-in-trade of

all zither players, she had given some adaptations of her own, of a French *gavotte* and an old English love-song, and now—at Mrs. Tomlinson's request for something a "bit more stirring"—of the German "Wacht am Rhein!" Whether it was the wide range of these fragments that made Eugenia's fancy drift, or whether she was mesmerised by Sir Edmund's gaze, she could not have told you, but, according to her wont, she was looking at him in her imagination, with her eyes cast down, as if his face were before her on her lap, and thinking to herself (what she would of course have disowned, had you taxed her with it) that she wished Sir Edmund were her brother. There was a sympathy between them; she was feeling *his* delight in this exquisitely-paced, old, foreign dance-music, *his* deep thrill in this pathetic, royalist love-song; but could he share the fibrous beat of her own heart in this national air?—a common

air enough, Eugenia knew, and sounding commoner than ever, with the zither's twang in it—for all Anne's clever playing—but still a stirring tune; yes! the more so for the tripping and the sentiment before it—vigorous—manly—brave . . .

Then she looked up, and saw Buck, standing near her underneath the cedar boughs!

Something like this had been Eugenia's thought, could one rightly uplift her maiden veil of calm, and watch the pulse beneath it beating time to the various music. "All these surroundings are very beautiful,"—here the *gavotte* was playing,—“these cedars and this pleasaunce; and to sit still in these long shadows is good;—and his companionship, what does it mean for me? It is part of a scheme which I have every right to make, which is not against my duty and hardly against my inclination; a scheme that this most amiable man and I should belong to each other, and

all my days be filled with *gavottes* and pleasures and cedars and good company. Is not that well?" Then came the royalist love-song, with its pathos, and the cry of a tender heart caught up in its bars for ever; and it said to Eugenia, "Oh, do you love this man? without cedars and good company and dancing days? Love him for himself and you? Love him for all time? *Love him with love?*" And so she fell to wondering if she could love Sir Edmund, and if that was why she wished he were her brother—or was it that she might be at home in his pleasure and his good company—and perhaps another with her? The wonder made her restless—motionless though she stayed. She did not know that she might not get to love him; (that was how she put it to herself;) neither Wisdean nor Shortlands had furnished her with this experience. One home had taught her the sound of the sea, and the other the

peace of the meadows; might it not be for Ashbank to bring her this better gift of love? What was wanting? what did it mean—that love was a new thing, that love was all? And then came the twang of the fierce German war-song, that had no national spell for her, and surely nothing to say of love, but that just clenched her heart with its masterful chords and made it beat, till she felt her colour change . . . and then she looked up—looked up and saw Buck, standing underneath the cedar boughs, and could not indeed have said if she liked or loathed him, could but have said that there was some one there, but in that instant knew that it was only as a brother, or as a friend—that emptier word—that she could love Sir Edmund Trefusis.

You may dazzle yourself with soft lamplight and call it day, until, when at morn you look out upon the hills, you are only blinded and cannot say, “The sun is up;” but the sun is

in the heavens though you wot not of it, and he shines for you, and at least you have the heart to say no longer, "This lamp of mine is the true light of day!"

It was only an instant, and yet it had told her all.

Anne Jefferies ceased playing, with a thrum across the strings; and she was naturally the centre of the three officers' notice for the moment. Mrs. Tomlinson, who had been thinking out a *menu*, came to her senses with symptoms of a snort, and introduced them to her, after presenting them to Lady Shortlands and Mrs. Buxton. Boville, as we have seen, was musical, and had not improbably recognised the air she had been playing, for he alluded to it as "that martial strain." Crossley and Buck stuck by each other at a respectful distance, made their bows together, and turned towards one another again with some identical word about

the beauty of the cedars. They furnished nothing more to the general scene than two good suits of clothes—with men in them—four well-planted feet and two red ears. Buck shifted his chin, more than Crossley did, over the stiff collar which would have galled a less seasoned throat—he was never perfectly still—and looked, with the self-consciousness of an underbred man, as if he had been brought there to box or fight;—much as the professional wrestler looks among the better actors on the stage, in the first act of “As you like it.”

Miss May Buxton adored “the service;” she thought the two young fellows might be “rather nice,” but thought so indiscriminately, and she left off thinking even thus much, when she got a good view of their Captain. The long moustaches and the eyeglass turned the scale.

“They are fine cattle!” said Lady Shortlands aloud to Mrs. Buxton, as if they had

been talking of farm stock. She had a *sang-froid* that let her say such things of men before their faces, and, to do her justice, they seldom perceived that she was speaking of them.

Mrs. Buxton underwent "her smile," which very often saved her a foolish utterance. She did not in the least know what Lady Shortlands meant, and her ladyship felt that she had cast her rhetorical pearls before swine. "Pick up your patchwork, Eugenia;" she went on impatiently, in the same loud voice, and it drew the three new pairs of eyes towards the group of which her niece was the centre.

("Rum old cat," thought Buck and Crossley together; like similarly prepared plates they took similar impressions.)

Sir Edmund and Eugenia stooped for the patchwork at the same moment, and it was just as she did so, that Buck's eyes first fell upon her face. It occurred to him—he could never be said to think—that an awkward

woman must have knocked her head against Sir Edmund's.

"Eugenia, that's a gassy name," was the conviction, produced by Lady Shortlands' utterance, in Buck and Crossley.

"You care as little for your needlework as Omphale did," said Sir Edmund.

"Who the deuce is Omphale?" wondered Buck:—Crossley happened to know:—he stared. Something in his glance made Eugenia brace herself, and she began talking faster than her wont. "I have more reverence for it than skill," she said. "I should have been a poor worker at such tapestries as adorn my bedroom here; just think, Sir Edmund,"—

("Oh, the lame beggar's a *card*, is he?" thought Buck, and he hated him for it).

—"Just think of it—wonderful people, with shields and helmets and battle-axes, and such remorseless cruel faces—noble too—and all this just women's needlework."

“Well, here are model men for you, at any rate!” put in Mr. Tomlinson, with his aggressive air of proprietorship in his guests—the same air which he had used to Eugenia on her arrival;—it was his reading of hospitality, and he touched the two young soldiers as he spoke: “I am sure our friends here, Mr. Crossley and Mr. Jarvis, would be proud to sit for you, Miss Brand, as long as you liked to work them. Our armoury would furnish the helmets and shields, and I think I can answer for the sinews,” he had hold of Buck’s arm as he spoke.

Crossley blushed a little, but Buck, to whom this sort of coarse praise was not unfamiliar, laughed and spread himself.

Eugenia swept them with her eyes, just acknowledging the introduction which Mr. Tomlinson’s mention of their names implied. Inwardly she blamed herself for speaking of the tapestries, nor could she have said how

she had come to do so—and to Sir Edmund! As for Sir Edmund, he was looking at her in a puzzled way that could not help her, and yet it was to him, and not to her aunt, that she turned in her embarrassment.

“Modern uniforms are nothing like that fine armour,” she said; “think of the opportunities for cross-stitch in a coat of mail, while a red coat would be the simplest groundwork. Is not the armour at Ashbank beautiful, Sir Edmund?”

“Ah! no more chance for the ironmongers now!” cried old Lady Shortlands—with her squeak, and a touch of sarcasm, to which only Mrs. Tomlinson and Eugenia had the clue and which Mrs. Tomlinson was too preoccupied to observe—“beat their spears into pruning-hooks, ploughshares—what is it, Vane?”

Sir Edmund, who, sensitive though he might be, was not snob enough to be perpetually con-

scious of the source of his father's wealth, set Lady Shortlands right in her quotation, without seeing that he fledged an arrow which was aimed against himself. Eugenia was indignant at her aunt; and, with her healthy instinct to get away from whatever was repugnant to her, she rose and crossed the grass to Anne.

("She did that," said Mrs. Buxton to herself, with an air of conviction, "entirely for show.")

Captain Boville was bending over the zither. He had already experienced the first half of the impression that Eugenia made—he felt that she was a woman, not a girl; and Captain Boville preferred girls, because they admired his moustaches more—now he began to experience the second half, and to feel that, despite his moustaches, he was less of a man than a monkey.

Crossley and Jarvis were perhaps not so impressionable; the latter, at all events, would

have been hard to shake out of the conviction of his manhood: "That's an uncommon fine girl," he said to Crossley, under his breath. They were standing apart from Anne and their senior officer.

"She looks like a princess," said Crossley.

"Princess be blowed!" said Buck, who often thought Crossley an ass; "I'd sooner talk to her than break my leg;" but, as he said so, another shifting of his chin brought his eyes back to May, who had attracted his roving glance already. At the same moment, Mrs. Tomlinson presented Crossley and himself to her, with an unfortunate misplacement of their names, and thus created a further diversion.

"*My* name is Crossley," said the owner of that patronymic,—"*rather crossly*," Vane remarked to Lady Shortlands; but she did not laugh at the pun, because she had meant to make it herself, in which event she would have laughed heartily.

“Oh!” said May with her pretty smile, and that faint, roseleaf flush which anything, or nothing, called to her soft cheeks, “then *you* are Mr. Jarvis?”

Buck nodded. “Yes,” he said, “I’m Mr. Jarvis!”

It was not much to say, but he said it in a way that deepened the flush. An ill-bred man can put a world of offence into his “how do you do?”—an intimacy that is almost an insult into his merest “good-bye.” When Buck said, “Yes, I’m Mr. Jarvis,” the effect of his utterance of the words was much the same as if another man had added, “And what do you think of that, my dear?”

May had not experience enough to construe this tone, which would have made a barmaid titter, but it set her upon her guard. “That is my cousin whose playing you were admiring,” she said, turning again from Buck’s blue stare to Crossley’s gentler, browner gaze;

“you could hardly have made out *what* she was playing, and it is lucky, for a German war-song is not up to her usual form.” May always became rather slangy when she was nervous.

“There are some rousing good tunes among 'em;” said Buck, as if deciding the point in question, with the authority of one after whose decision the world might wag as it could—the lesser niceties of criticism being left to meaner intelligence.

And then Crossley and May Buxton fell to telling each other what *they* thought about German war-songs (it was pleasant that their tastes agreed), and they discovered that they had both heard a selection of them at the Crystal Palace, when they were quite children, and Crossley said he wished he could recollect the date, for the war-songs were given several times during the period of the Franco-Prussian war; and May said she thought she

could find it, for she had kept a diminutive diary about that time, when she had been a very busy little girl. And then Crossley said he hoped they had heard them *on the same day*, and then he became involved, and May blushed and began to think he was "quite nice," but to wish that Mr. Jarvis had looked piqued, and had not wheeled round in that odious way, as if nothing that she said *could* matter, and as if the choice of war-songs were a question entirely beneath his notice;—there being a species of crass ignorance which is almost as impressive as the indifference of an expert, had May Buxton only known it.

Meanwhile Eugenia had been asking Anne to sing, Captain Boville having found his courage to join in the request. Anne was noway loth to comply, having one of those small voices, perfectly cultivated and perfectly controlled, which require no humouring, and

are as suited to a lawn as to a music-room. But she revenged herself upon her audience for that German war-song, by singing something weird, in a minor key, and with words in an unknown tongue.

“That is the best of all the Swedish melodies,” said Sir Edmund, when she ended it, and, in contrast to the stupid thanks of the others, Eugenia thought his knowledge delightful.

“It is beautiful;” she said, as she had said of the Cellini cup; that much she knew, although she did not know the song; her instincts were ahead of her culture.

“Yes, it is beautiful;” said Sir Edmund, who appreciated Eugenia’s conviction as well as the music, and who had pushed his long chair nearer to Anne, with a peculiar movement that was half confidential and half tutorial—“it is beautiful, but it was thrown away. Look at the face of that man who is

leaning against the boughs of the cedar to your left; did you ever see anything—*passez-moi le mot*—so indisputably Philistine? Had you but caught a glimpse of him, during your song, he would have paralysed its refrain.”

“I never see any one when I am singing,” said Anne.

“I know, and this time it was well for you! He thinks there is somebody looking at him, but he does not know that it is I. Be merciful, Miss Jefferies, you don’t happen to sing ‘Villikins and his Dinah,’ do you?”

Anne laughed: Sir Edmund’s comment had been quite in her own vein. “No, I don’t,” she said, “there’s a song called ‘He’s got ’em on;’—I wish I knew it, for it would be really appropriate. I go as far as ‘Christy Minstrels’ though, sometimes. Do you know ‘Old folks at home,’ Miss Brand?—that is ‘beautiful’ too, by the way.”

Then, without further prelude, she sang the

sweet old-fashioned melody. Eugenia still stood listening, her eyes filling with the picture. The whole circle was very silent.

Anne sang on, not too slowly, but in the only half pathetic, and half careless, style that best suits the meaning of the simple song :

*“ One little hut among de bushes
One dat I love ;
Still sadly to my memory rushes,
No matter where I rove ”—*

(“ I like that ‘ rushes, ’ ” said Sir Edmund softly to Eugenia.)

“ Christy’s ! by George,” said Buck, surprised into unmusical speech, as Anne played a few last chords, which sounded very ringing in the entranced stillness. He had heard the song murdered by some girls, at Clifton or elsewhere, whom he had found to his liking, and had himself joined in an unison chorus, with great effect he flattered himself—at least his voice had been heard. “ Have you been to

those new minstrels, Miss Brand, and do you know 'Mary's gone with a coon'? It's an almighty good song."

"No," said Eugenia kindly, "I don't know it; they sing very well, I have heard."

Sir Edmund looked up astonished. He had half expected her to petrify the bold lieutenant with a scornful glance, or freeze the words upon his lips by silence. Eugenia was the last person present to be tolerant of such a speech, nor could she have explained why she answered the infelicitous remark—blurted out, as it was, at the wrong time and in the wrong context, with such gentleness and pity. She was not used to be tactful, and was both surprised and ashamed in her own heart that she had troubled to smooth off the rough edges of Buck's blunder.

Mr. Buck himself was, naturally, conscious of neither surprise nor shame. "'Mary's gone with a *coon*'!" he said loudly, illustrating the

crescendo of the song in a somewhat tuneless way. "That's the style of thing, you know; and then they've got a chap that fights with a bantam—haven't they, Crossley?"

This speech was an unusually long one for Lieutenant Jarvis, and he was glad to shift its weight on to his comrade's shoulders, should it entail cross-questioning. He was not given to *racontes*, and would not have troubled to say thus much, had he not felt that he was on safe ground and likely to distinguish himself. "Hang it all!" he was saying in his heart, with an involuntary wish that he felt more at home in the company about him than he really did, "let 'em see they've got a chap among 'em that knows something about it;" and in this happy frame of mind he leaned against the cedar boughs again. He was blessedly unaware that Anne Jefferies was laughing at something Captain Boville said to her about him;—for Captain Boville had

just brains enough to see when another man made a fool of himself—and that Mrs. Buxton was whispering to Vane her most fatal verdict that he was “vulgar.” Eugenia was, however, aware of both the laugh and the whisper, and pursued that unaccountable instinct which had impelled her to the luckless warrior’s rescue. As she looked at him she felt her temples throb and her heart beat quicker. “You like songs?” she said.

“Yes, Miss Brand,” said Buck, “I like a good song with a chorus,—I know a song or two, by Jove—but I don’t care much about music, you know.”

“No;” said Eugenia—weakly she felt, but she did not find anything else to say. She resented “you know,” she resented this young man altogether. That was the feeling that Buck brought her, resentment—so much more dangerous than dislike. It was strange that she did not wish him to make himself de-

spised, but her resentment was not the judicial glow that springs from calm contempt. It was full of passion. She could sooner have struck him on the mouth than not have listened.

Because at this moment of the summer day in this place of cedars, Eugenia was making a discovery, some such an one as a person might make who had always lived at low tide—could one imagine the case—when the tide rose. It is hard to put it into words, for it is only half described as an “awakening.” At Buck’s first look, we know that she had felt to brace herself, forced to move, to speak, to make some self-display, as a noble horse will arch its neck at its stupid master’s glance. Then followed the reaction of reason—an involuntary sense of having abased herself that one shy word from Buck would have dispelled. But, with the wisdom of the fool, he spoke no word: he only went on staring at her and thought her figure and her manner “fine.”

He was thinking about women in general, she was thinking of no man but him, and,—heaven save the mark!—they were talking about music.

“Now then,” said Lady Shortlands, who began to be fidgetty, the moment she saw Eugenia parted from Sir Edmund, “organise something, Mrs. Tomlinson; bless the woman! No! I don’t mean make a plan. Nobody wants to start off and see your dairies (which you never go near, I’ll warrant, unless you’ve got a houseful), just stir them up a bit—not the milk-*pans*, but the milk-*sops*—eh, Vane! and make them mix. Society, Tomlinson,” she added, turning her shaky old head to her inefficient host, “is like a pudding; you must keep it together, but you mustn’t let it settle.”

—“And distribute the plums and the sugar, as equally as you can, throughout,” added Vane, who liked Lady Shortlands’ homely metaphors.

“Yes,” concluded her ladyship; “or else it will taste of the suet!”

(Mrs. Tomlinson might not know much about society, but, thanks to her handy manual, she knew something about puddings, and elsewhere would have said so with pride. She knew too what Vane meant by “plums” and “sugar,” and she guessed what Lady Shortlands meant by “suet.” Afterwards she said so to her husband :

“By ‘suet,’ Mr. Tomlinson,” she said, “the old harridan meant you and me—you and me, and perhaps Mr. Jarvis. You may be blind and deaf and he may be a poltroon; I am not blind and deaf (though I may be ‘suet,’) and I am not a poltroon; and if she does chop me up, she’ll find it pretty hard to digest me, and so I tell you” (but here Mrs. Tomlinson found—for this happened later—that far from putting any weight into this awful

threat, her husband had already fallen asleep).

And so it came about that, at Lady Shortlands' own suggestion, Anne and May started to put on their tennis skirts, while Eugenia, who had no tennis skirt, went with them to pin up her dress. Mr. Vane and his host, between them, took "the army," as Lady Shortlands dubbed the new arrivals, to don their flannels, and Richard Crossley and Arthur Jarvis felt that their moment was come.

One parting glance at the sunburnt lawn, before the business of the afternoon commenced; the young people giving their elders messages for home letters to be written by post-time, the elders looking for their tea, which was just being brought out to them, upon trays of gleaming silver. There were old Lady Shortlands, on her wicker-sofa gay with cushions, and Mrs. Tomlinson in her

high arm-chair, with a beaded footstool, and Mrs. Buxton with her parasol up, despite the cedar shade.

And there were Lord Shortlands, pretending that he heard what Mr. Buxton was saying about southdowns and shorthorns, and Sir Edmund, idling with a journal and watching them all patiently, as he would watch the tennis by-and-by.

And then, descending from the turfed plateau, getting out of the sweet cedar shade into the open sunshine, was the group for whom afternoon still meant, not leisure, but time for work and play. Captain Boville and Lieutenant Crossley, sticking close together by Anne and pretty May, as they followed Mr. Tomlinson and Vane—rather ashamed, to say truth, of their friend Jarvis' efforts at musical criticism, and looking as if they did not want to belong to him, despite their similarity of garb.

And Eugenia—our dear Eugenia—still standing in the shadow with the young poet James Chatteris, not cousin only, but sworn knight long ere this ; and full in front of her—right in the glow—masterful Buck, in his big suit of *dittos* and his regulation boots, waiting to walk towards the house with her, for no other reason than that she was the handsomest woman there, while he was well convinced he was the finest man. “By George,” he thought, “if she can dance like she can walk, she won’t be a bad find for yours truly!”

“Give mother my best love,” said Eugenia to her aunt, as she stepped down ; “I will send Parfitt with your tonic.” She still felt rather to be Lady Shortlands’ nurse than her charge, and she still felt that she could not be silent.

And then she set foot in the sunlight, side-by-side with Buck, for a mere game of play ; and for Eugenia, not again would the cedar

shadows lengthen and the grass smell sweet of the needles of the pine, or the afternoon only wax into a peaceful cool, as just that day, any more, quite the same way—for ever!

CHAPTER VI.

MUTUAL.

THERE were several tennis-courts at Ashbank, turfed or gravelled, of nearly all which the cedar-plateau commanded a view. The eight players put in such appearances as ten minutes dressing-time and their individual tastes or wardrobes provided. Anne Jefferies and Buck—at two extreme poles of thought on most matters, as they were likely to prove—were the only ones equipped with elaborate care, though in Anne's case the costume was one due to the foresight of her dressmaker and her maid, and not, as in Buck's, to active personal vanity. She looked distinguished enough, her dark head showing to advantage over the neat,

though fanciful, dress which became her slight figure well. Buck, too, was the handsomer for his change to white knickerbockers and a jersey. He never looked so well as in uniform, the putting on of it seemed to exhibit his reserve fund of strength, and this tennis dress gave him something of the strapped look that uniform did, while it conferred on him additional grace by the easy display it afforded of his throat and limbs. He wore a striped sash round his waist and a striped cap upon his curly head.

Vane and Chatteris had tennis suits too, but they were less dressed—or rather, less undressed—than Buck was; and his fellow-officers were in ordinary boating flannels. May's frock was altered in aspect by a pretty embroidered apron with a pocket for the balls; but Eugenia had only gathered up the skirts of her white gown a little, and tied them firmly back, with a wide old-fashioned scarf which

served an apron's purpose, into such a knot as Atalanta might have used.

Boville and Anne played Crossley and May upon the gravelled court, while Eugenia and Vane faced Buck and Chatteris on the grass. Buck wanted to be on Eugenia's side, but, little as he thought of Chatteris' *physique*, he remembered that a man comrade, however great a duffer, is more amenable to your calls to "play up" than a lady, and may even be stimulated by oaths.

For any one with a keen delight in the beauty of living people—and to this Sir Edmund was almost morbidly susceptible—there could hardly have been chosen better types of man and woman than Arthur Jarvis and Eugenia Brand. Vane and Chatteris looked, respectively, lanky and mean beside them, while the other *quartette* were mere imitative marionettes in comparison with their free movement. To Sir Edmund, who was far too unselfish to grudge her a pas-

time in which he could not share, it was like hearing music to watch Eugenia play. Her whole being seemed significant of activity. May skipped and giggled, while Anne was not completely attentive, though she surprised you sometimes ; but Eugenia, healthy and single-hearted as she was, devoted all her mind, for the moment, as well as all her energies, to the game ; whereas Buck, who was always self-conscious though he was never sensitive, felt over-much that the eyes of the world were upon him and was poorly seconded by Chatteris. He was disposed to quarrel with the poet, not knowing him to be "an Honourable," when after a most brilliant match, his side was beaten at last by Chatteris's failure to take a clever service of Vane's. Indeed, he said something under his breath, contemptuous and not too delicately phrased, which made his young companion colour to the roots of his hair ; and, after he had said it, he turned sulky, went up to

the net, and began tightening the ropes instead of listening to Chatteris' excuses. Vane, who never lost his temper, and whose humour was rendered additionally placid by his victory, watched him with some amusement. He had heard Jarvis say two or three things already, when he was standing in the inner court during Eugenia's service, which made him think him rather "an outsider," and a burst of temper would not have astonished him. But Eugenia, still under the same strange spell of peace-making which had moved her from the first, walked also up to the net, racquet in hand, and with a lovely flush upon her cheeks in which triumph had no share :—

"How well you play!" she said to Buck. She did not add his name, and he took a slight advantage of the intimacy in her tone and did not assume civility.

"I ought to," he answered roughly, "but that muff's no good at all! If he wasn't worse

than any girl, we should have licked you easy."

It was an ungraceful speech, for he could not know but what the poet was Eugenia's brother, or at least her closest ally. As he made it, he jerked his racquet in the direction where Chatteris was standing, leaving his ex-partner no doubt that he was the subject of his comment. Poor Jem looked reproachfully towards Eugenia, as he humbly collected the balls and threw them across to Vane.

Eugenia was at a loss what answer to make. She was afraid of hurting Chatteris, if she proposed to take him on her side—with which odds against her she would moreover be sure to lose—and she could not fairly join forces with such a Titan as Buck, against the poet and Vane, even to flatter the lieutenant by a victory.

"Let us take a turn," she said at last: "the air is so very still—hark! there is surely

thunder—and it is warm,” she added, though in Buck’s own vocabulary, like himself, she had “not turned a hair.”

Vane and Chatteris, who were in less good training, were hot and rather blown: they stayed to put on their jackets, and perhaps to exchange remarks upon Buck’s want of breeding; and thus it fell out that Eugenia paced the lawn alone with her companion, —Sir Edmund still watching their movements, with more pleasure than apprehension, from the cedar plateau.

Buck lifted his striped cap, and pushed up his hair with his rough hand, after which he smacked his thigh with it: then he was himself again. His big chest heaved evenly, while Eugenia’s breathing was but little quickened by the exercise that had added a vivid charm to her beauty.

“That chap can’t play, you know,” he said confidentially. He had no idea of conversa-

tion, but he felt that he had an opportunity for compliment, which he must not lose: "let you and me play those two fellows, and we'll teach 'em a thing or two!" He looked at her as he spoke, expecting perhaps that she would laugh or smile. Eugenia did not look at him, (though she saw his face before her quite clearly) and she neither laughed nor smiled; only her voice as she answered was singularly gentle.

"I have played a great deal, this summer:" she said, "my London season was a very short one: I live in the country."

"It's the *make* that does it, more than the practice," said Buck, still looking at her figure. The remark might have been offensive, and in that case none would have resented it more than Eugenia, but it was made with such a plain brutality and carelessness that she was neither flattered nor offended. — "If I were tending the sick," she thought to herself, find-

ing an excuse, against her wont, for his want of polish, "I should not be annoyed, if the doctor spoke to me as to a professional nurse ; and, if I play these games, I must submit to be spoken to as an athlete." So she said, not without a touch of amusement at her own answer—

"Yes : I am long in the legs and arms."

Buck opened his grey eyes and stared in impertinent reproof. "Oh ! long in the *reach*, we call it !" he said, with a laugh that was less endurable, and that froze Eugenia's smile at her own plain speaking. She felt she had been funny for nothing ; and took rhetorical refuge out of her companion's reach, as a bird might hop to a higher bough.

"A tyro's terms for things sound always like mistakes," she said ; with a note of dignity in her voice, which had its effect on Buck, though he did not understand what she said. He supplied the deficiency in his understanding by a yawn

and said "yes;" and though Eugenia did not, like May Buxton, mistake his ignorance for contempt, she kindly descended to his level again—perhaps because she could not help herself—and made some criticism on the fashion of his racquet. As she did so, she looked at his hands—clumsy veined hands, unlike a gentleman's, with short flushed nails round which the skin ridged a little—and she experienced a feeling almost like repulsion. He took hold of her racquet, to compare its weight and network with his own's, and, though he did not even touch her fingers, she felt as if his hand had grasped her heart. Such a sensation defies analysis: it is nothing, and yet it is all oneself: like the influence of weather. In this case it was the symbol of his entire mastery over her nerves, and, when she took the racquet from him again, she knew exactly where his hard fingers had pressed the handle. Her own hand closed upon the place, almost

without her will. Eugenia was unused to such acuteness of perception ; it troubled her—perhaps it was the thunder in the air that made her feel so deadly faint. She took off her hat, but when she found that the action attracted Buck's gaze to her beautiful hair, she put it on again. She was restless—she could not breathe freely—she wanted to get away.

Buck divined nothing of her restlessness ; he admired her greatly, and liked to walk along the lawns beside her ; he thought Crossley would have been awkward in his place, and he was quite sure he was not awkward himself. He expanded his chest, put his racquet under his arm and his hands into his pockets and whistled a little. “Rather nice grounds!” he said possessively. (He had never been in any gardens like them in his life, but he did not say that.)

“Yes,” Eugenia answered thoughtfully : “that is a fine cypress alley, with its cool

shadows : though indeed this sultriness is not sun-heat, but storm. I wish Mr. Vane and my cousin would join us."

"Is that muff your cousin?" said Buck blushing.

Eugenia smiled ; "Yes ; and he is a great poet," she said with gentle reproach, "you see you should not have abused him to me."

She expected him to apologise, but he did not ; he only looked hot and sullen : "I never thought much of poets," he said, "and, cousin or no cousin, he's no business to play tennis here."

Just as they turned into the cypress alley, after glancing round to see that Vane and Chatteris had started to follow them, Mrs. Tomlinson summoned those two gentlemen to the cedar plateau, to explain the other set, which was not yet over,—adding that "she felt rain in the air, and believed a drop had

fallen upon her nose." It was some minutes before Eugenia perceived that Vane and Chatteris were not following them, and when she did so, it occurred to her that she ought not to feel embarrassed. She was not at her ease, but was the more determined to try and appear so, surprised at her own disquiet. Mr. Buck began to be quite at his ease, and felt himself distinguished by her favour; the cypress alley led to a fountain which he expressed a wish to visit, but when they reached it, the first fountain proved to be only the sentinel of a fine cluster, and he had led Eugenia some considerable distance from the tennis courts, when a few heavy drops warned her of the thunder shower, to which she had attributed her faintness.

"By George," said Buck, "it's going to pelt: you don't mind a little rain, do you?"

"No," said Eugenia: she never took cold;

but to her own amazement, she found herself looking at *him*, and hoping that he would not get harm from the rain.

It was nothing at first, and they stood by the fountain watching the big drops fall into the plashing water, till, all of a sudden, a perfect sheet of rain descended on them from the bursting storm-cloud. To do Eugenia justice, her immediate thought was of Lady Shortlands' safety, but she recollected that there was a red-brick orangery, close behind the cedars—which indeed completed their shelter—where the party on the lawn could take refuge in a moment. What refuge was there for herself and Buck?

Her shoulders were wet already, and the drops that rained from her companion's cap seemed to hiss upon the bare muscles of his neck and arms, as he stood before her; exposing himself, more than he need have done, to the deluge, out of *bravado*.

“ You will get very wet,” she said.

Buck laughed. “ Oh ! a wetting’s good for me,” he said ;—“ cools my ardour ; I wish I’d got a coat for you, but I’m afraid I mustn’t offer to take off my jersey.” However, as the rain showed no signs of abating, he suggested, in a minute or two, that they should try to get back to a little Doric temple in the cypress alley, which was used as a gardener’s storehouse.

They retraced their steps to it, but found it locked ; still there was shelter underneath its coping, just between the columns ;—only a ledge of shelter, though, for the rain drove towards it. Eugenia stood upon the steps between two of the pillars, which were deep. Buck planted himself in front of her, still in the rain, and feeling the hardier for this little circumstance of weather. He was about as likely to suffer from cold or wet as a strong young tree : but Eugenia, who had no fears

for herself, continued unaccountably to feel solicitude for him.

“Go between those next pillars,” she said, with a smile; it seemed absurd to place this young demigod in a niche, even while she proposed it.

“No, I shan’t!” said Buck manfully; “you’d get wet;” and he spread himself in front of her, putting a strong arm on either pillar, the rain driving hard upon his back and shoulders.

“I don’t mind the rain,” said Eugenia—with some contrariety, she was aware, after having taken shelter in this precipitate way. Buck’s eyes were close to her face, and level with it—for he stood on the step beneath her—and he could see her colour slowly heighten; then she grew pale and shivered. Girls’ colour usually did heighten when Mr. Buck had been talking to them a few minutes; he was disposed to take that as his due, a sort of crimson, put out at his royal coming, but the pallor—this

healthy lily-pallor of Eugenia's was a new symptom. "I don't want you to get wet," he said, leaning rather closer.

Eugenia was fluttered—she felt nervously that she *must do something*, she could not stand idle under his glance. So beautiful a woman was intuitively aware that to let a man's eyes rest upon her face, without the screen of speech, is often more intimate than talking. Moreover, she was really anxious for him; he was so hot and so wet—his thin jersey steamed and smelt of rain. After an instant's hesitation, she untied the knot behind her, into which her skirts were gathered, and loosened the wide scarf of brocade which she had taken to metamorphose her costume for playing. "Put this round your shoulders," she said to Buck.

Buck laughed outright, but he took the scarf; and, a moment later, Eugenia wished he had not done so, for he was disposed to

regard it as the vehicle for a rather pronounced bit of flirtation.

"Won't the rain spoil it?" he said as he helped her to detach it.

"It does not matter if it does,—it is mine;" said Eugenia coolly.

"I don't know how to get it on; there's some dodge," he said; "you must put it round me."

May Buxton would have told him to "do it himself," his familiars would have tittered and said, "Get along with you!" Eugenia did not quite know what to say, but it occurred to her that it was nothing to make a piece of work about, after all; the thing she had to do was to ward off the rain, which drove against his back. So she quickly threw it over him, spread out to its full width, and knotted it loosely in front, flinging the ends back over his shoulder. It did not make him in the least ridiculous, but blended with

his tennis-sash, as if it had been part of a fancy dress. It had silk fringes, and he stood drawing them through his square fingers and looking at Eugenia. That he should have something of hers round him made an extraordinary link between them; and this was one of those breathless days when every pulse is quickened, until, to a sensuous organisation, life becomes as keen as pain. Buck's whole frame was thrilled. It flashed upon him, while Eugenia, with her eyelids down, was fastening the scarf about his body that this was something like a new experience, and that he had never been with anybody who was "worthy to be put in the same street with" Eugenia Brand. But the flash was a dull one. Had Sir Edmund Trefusis been in his place, he would have felt her gesture like a benediction and have taken it with reverence; but, naturally, Buck's view of the episode was a different one to Sir Edmund's.

His curiosity was roused, and he wanted to push his satisfaction further—"to see what she would stand." When he was a boy, although his interest in grammar and the hemispheres was small, he never rested till he had broken a plaything, or found out if his dolls were all wax ; and so, now, he felt the promptings of a vague desire to find out if this care for his well-being had anything to do with that roseleaf flush and lily pallor which had alternated on Eugenia's cheek.

There was a moment's pause, while he pondered, for his processes were slow. Then she became possessed of an over-mastering wish to get free, into whatever tempest of rain, but she was still afraid of the sound of her own voice ; she clasped her hands upon her racquet, and peered out from her prison.

"What's the matter?" he asked : why should she be restless, now that he was protected ?

"I think the rain is ceasing," she said, for his bulk kept it from her; she was astonished at the effort it cost her to say even so common a sentence.

"Oh! *is it?*" said Buck laughing; "that's because I'm so thick through; can't you *hear* it?" He knew she could *see* little but his own big self, his two hands bounded her scope; but he did *not* know that, by calling her sense of hearing into play, he gave her a moment's relief from the tension of her nerves.

She tried to listen and so found her voice: "Have you ever read Chopin's life?" she said.

"No," said Buck, as careless as he was ignorant who Chopin was.

"I remember," said Eugenia, conscious of that hop to the higher bough again, "a passage about his composing one of the *préludes*, while he was with Georges Sand; who, on returning from a lengthened absence, found

that he had been *setting the rain upon the roof to music*, in his anxiety about her."

"About *who?*" said Buck, who liked the sentiment, in his present mood.

"About *her*," said Eugenia; she had not sounded the depths of Mr. Jarvis' unlearnedness.

"Phew!" said Buck, with a knowing whistle; "*and what did Master George say when he found out there was a lady in the case?*"

For an instant Eugenia could not even understand him, then the reaction shook her with uncontrollable laughter. "Georges Sand *was* the lady," she said, not daring to look at him, for fear of his sinking into the ground with shame at his own blunder; but he was too prosperous and too conceited for shame.

"Was she?" he said, "what sporting names some women have! upon my soul I thought you said *George* somebody."

Evidently an explanation was of no use here. Eugenia held her peace.

"*You've* got rather a rum name," he said presently, "Eugénie, isn't it?"—he pronounced it in the French way, but with a strong British accent of which he was happily unaware.

Eugenia winced. "No," she said, "it is *not* Eugénie, it is Eugenia—a Greek name not a French one—and it is a good name; it means 'nobility,' does it not?" (she thought all men knew Greek).

"Oh!" said Buck, "by Jove! that's you all over then; but *what do they call you for short?*"

The question would have been clear enough to almost any girl but Eugenia. But she had never had brother or sister, her father had not been given to caresses, and her mother seldom said her name. She had no pet-name; she did not understand. "What do *who* call me for short?" she said.

"Why, your 'sisters and your cousins and

your aunts,' " said Buck ; but Eugenia had lived out of earshot of Gilbert's witticisms, and he inwardly dubbed her as rather dull.

" My mother has always called me Eugenia," she said, " and so do the Shortlands." Her manner and Lord Shortlands' dignity, together, stopped him from answering as he might have answered May.

" *I* am always called by a nickname," he said, with a sense of apology.

" Are you ? " said Eugenia. It was odd that the moment he began to talk about himself she heard her heart beat again, and felt this overmastering impulse to get free : " What is your name ?—Jarvis, isn't it ? " Buck thought it was the first time he had ever heard his name sound sweet ; for she said it with diffidence ; she felt the strangeness of the situation, standing between his arms as closely as if she were dancing with him ; and asking him deliberately, his name.

“My name is Mr. Arthur John Jarvis,” he answered — the “Mr.” jarring on Eugenia’s finer instinct of speech — “but everybody calls me Buck.”

“Do they?” she said absently, as if it did not matter, (nor did it). “Why?”

“Oh! I don’t know; because I used to eat American cakes, or something.”

“How do you *sign* your name?” said Eugenia: she felt the topic was a safe one, and she was amused a little, despite this curious heart-beating.

“Buck Jarvis,” he said, “unless it’s a bill, and then I put A. J.”

“Oh!” said Eugenia, still absently; “*and then you put A. J.*” She did not care; and yet she felt that all her mind was concentrated upon this unbeautiful name. It seemed written up in front of her, and the rain repeated it.

The rain? it was decreasing certainly; the evening sky was brightening.

"I think we can get back to the cedars now," she said, but at the same moment she ceased to wish to go. Buck too desired to prolong the *tête-à-tête*.

"What do you want to get back to those fiddle-headed old Tomlinsons for?" he asked.

"What is 'fiddle-headed'?" said Eugenia, through her reproachful smile.

"Oh, *they're* fiddle-headed, don't you know; *chalk* and all that."

"I never heard the term before: it doesn't mean 'musical-looking,' does it?"

"God bless you, no!" said Buck with a loud laugh—he often said "God bless you," and meant nothing by it when he said it; but Eugenia remembered that he *had* said it, afterwards—so long afterwards!—"I didn't use to like the word either," he went on, making an anecdotal effort to balance her story of Chopin; "I remember licking a chap at school because he opened my photo-album,

where I was fool enough to keep my old people's photos then, and he said what a fiddle-headed lot they were."

Eugenia kept a photograph of her mother in an olive-wood frame upon her dressing-table, wherever she might be. She wondered whether Mr. Arthur John Jarvis and his frank school-friend would call it "fiddle-headed," and if they did, what she should do? "I am glad you licked him," she said.

"Why, of *course* I licked him," said Buck spreading himself again a little, "but I took out the photos all the same."

"You love your father and your mother very dearly," said Eugenia in a kind, low voice; she did not quite know on how sacred ground she might be treading.

"Oh, so-so!" said Buck, "it wasn't *that* so much. It was because, when I looked at the photos in the other chaps' books, I thought mine *were* a fiddle-headed lot—"

“Oh!” said Eugenia. There was a note of pained entreaty in her voice, but it missed him and he went on;

“They’re *stick-in-the-mud*, you know, Miss Brand—that’s what they are. I don’t think much of them; but, by the Lord, *they think an awful deal of me!*”

“Let us go now,” said Eugenia. Although she saw he had no sense of shame to speak like this, and therefore forgave him, *she* felt ashamed. She fancied that she saw “Buck Jarvis’ people”—saw them wrongly no doubt, for Eugenia’s freshly-awakened heart was judging, and too impulsively. But she saw that he was not bred from the order to which she belonged herself; and she imagined poor and humble parents, quite wrapped up in the welfare of their soldier son. She conjectured how this chance word of his, to a stranger, would hurt them, could they have heard it. She saw in her mind a grey-headed father—

an unsuccessful man—a mother, dowdy, old-fashioned, “fiddle-headed,” with a long grave face. Perhaps they sat at home and talked of him in some quiet orchard, perhaps they prayed for him. . . . She was wrong! Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis, “fiddle-headed” though they might be, were neither old-fashioned nor sensitive. They would have laughed, had they heard the way Buck spoke of them, though they would have actively resented the epithet as *cheek*, and Mrs. Jarvis would have boxed his ears. No! had Eugenia known the world better she could have told that this young lord of the creation was not sprung from a sensitive stock. But then our dear Eugenia did not know the world. She knew the book of the sea and the book of the meadows, as Sir Edmund had seen, and some written books beside. But she had no guide for an estimate of “Buck Jarvis’ people.” —“Let us go now!” she said. His speeches were busy contradictions of his strong personal

influence : she wanted to hear no more of them. And he, a little surprised at her poor appreciation of his humour and general efforts at conversation, let her out of her niche, with something very like a sigh, and walked by her side ; the sky gradually widening over them, and the relieved air, with the mutual elasticity of their step, seeming to Eugenia to free her a little from the intolerable oppression that was upon her.

They went back along the cypress-alley. Its aspect was transfigured now ; the sombre trees shone with big jewel-drops of rain, the baked paths glistened, and water-runnels lay on either side of the raised walk against the vivid green of the refreshed turf. The young lieutenant was the fresher too for his rain bath ; his crisp hair was curlier, though the fringes of Eugenia's scarf hung straight and draggled at his side. He took them in his hands and wrung them out.

As they turned the corner where the alley gave upon the lawns, the scene that met their eyes was very different to that they had so lately left, and the anomaly was greater because it had worn its trimmer air under the storm-clouded sky, and kept its confusion for the return of the placid golden light.

Eugenia paused amazed. "Look," she said, "how altered it all is!"

"By George!" said Buck; he did not notice a great difference. The people had taken shelter from the rain, that was all he saw; a little more or less confusion did not strike him as anything out of the way.

But confusion there was; the wicker tables had been hastily stripped of newspapers and letters, the rugs rolled up, the light chairs and couches dismantled of their rich stuffs, and turned topsy-turvy upon the lawn for the rain to drain off them; on the courts, the racquets had been hastily thrown into their

cases, the nets loosened and the balls collected; an earthquake could not have produced a more complete *bouleversement*, but the sun was shining over all!

It did not definitely occur to Eugenia that, in this sunlit overturn, she was contemplating a type of her own life; but she felt in sympathy with the scene—as well she might. Under a moral heaven, calm as yet, but with infinite possibilities of tempest, her life had lain as trimly ordered as that cedar garden with its games. Hurriedly the storm had gathered, hurriedly the landmarks of her lawns had been left and overthrown, her pastimes spoiled, the crowd of pleasant thoughts that were her guests flying with fluttering skirts to other harbours. But the torrent had fallen now, the windows of the sky were opened, and over all the desolation and disturbance gleamed the golden light “that never was on land or sea,” and altered all.

They two stood still at the end of the cypress-alley before crossing the wet grass, where a Diana and Endymion faced each other, in marble, at its corners. The change that was about them brought them at least the recognition of their prolonged absence together. Perhaps at the moment, Eugenia wanted to say some helpful word to this young man, and Buck to make some tender speech to this beautiful woman. But just then, his keen sight, trained to long marking in his rifle-practice, detected faces pressed against the glass-doors of the orangery opposite, and the waving of a handkerchief with a bright border. Immediately afterwards the door was opened, and there was the whole group, mocking the sad plight of the truants, and laughing at the draggled scarf—all, that is, but two of them. Sir Edmund was anxious for Eugenia's safety, and Lady Shortlands was rather wet—not having been able to run fast to shelter—and extremely angry. She

prescribed them both some horrible posset of her own concoction at once, and threatened Eugenia with bed; "And as for you, Mr. Jones," she said, focussing the offending Buck with her eyeglass—Lady Shortlands often found it too much trouble to remember your name correctly, and expended much time, people said, upon finding an *alias* that would annoy you—"as for you, you look as if you had been playing at *poses plastiques*. For God's sake, go and put some clothes on, before you come into the presence of decent people! My niece is a wild woman of the woods, I know; but even *she* seems to have done her very best for you, by giving up her own garments. Here, give me that scarf before you go—your poor mother's best scarf, Eugenia! Parfitt must see what she can do for it. Upon my word! young man," she concluded, not without some admiration in her tone, as Buck clumsily untied the scarf, and giving it to her, stood in his soaked jersey and

his pride of muscle ; “you might stand for a statue ; who was the man who swam the Hellespont ? ”

“ Hero,” said Mrs. Tomlinson, feeling rather proud of herself ; had she been uncertain she would not have ventured to put in her word, but she was quite sure it was “ *Hero*,” and that he had swum across the Hellespont, “to *Leanda*.”

“ ‘ Hero ’ ! what Hero ? why, bless me if the woman doesn’t think that Hero was the man ! Yes, thank you, Mrs. Tomlinson, *Leander*. Vane, where’s Vane ? you really must tell that to Milord. Now Mr. Jones, I’m old-fashioned ; do, do go and put your clothes on.”

Buck laughed outright. Anne would laugh afterwards, though she looked demure now, but Sir Edmund was pained ; as for Eugenia, she was smoothing her wet dress, and her face was turned away—she exhibited only a sweep

of brown hair charged with raindrops, and that showed no blushes. When she fronted the group again, she was quite collected, and her tone was cool, though higher than before. But she did not look at Buck as she addressed him. "Thank you very much," she said, "for keeping the rain off me; Aunt Agatha, surely you had better come back now to the house, perhaps your feet are wet."

Anne Jefferies and Vane were much occupied with this scene, in which their elders took a more languid interest. Lord Shortlands was trying hard to gather what had occurred, from a critical survey of the wet couple, whom he vaguely imagined to have fallen into a fountain, and whom he pronounced to be "very dry *considering*." He said so tentatively.

"I *am* 'dry,'" said Buck in a savage undertone, to Crossley; "damned dry, and I wish the old buffer would dry up himself, and let me go and get a B. and S."

May Buxton and James Chatteris sympathised about Eugenia :

“So very awkward for her,” said pretty May, as she connected the particulars, “to be boxed up like that, with the monster, for half an hour !”

“Yes,” said the poet, puzzled at the change—he knew not what—in Eugenia’s aspect : “it was like an eclipse of the moon.”

May did not understand him, but Anne—who overheard him—did, and laughed. “With the shadow of some very earthy earth, to hide her !” she said to Vane.

“I am glad it was not you, May,” murmured Mrs. Buxton. “Miss Brand of course is older and—” Somehow May did not re-echo the wish. She had found herself looking at Buck once or twice, while she spoke of Eugenia ; and each time she was aware that he answered her look. He was not such a thorough “officer” as Captain Boville, but he was very

manly and tall—May thought him tall—and then he was the hero of the moment, at least Lady Shortlands had said so.

“Let us get back to the house now,” interrupted Mr. Buxton, fuming at the delay, for it was fine now, and he wanted “another talk with Tomlinson about those farms.”

His remark roused them all to the remembrance that they were several minutes’ wet walk from the house, and Vane volunteered, with Chatteris, to get some footmen to bring one of the tasselled *chaises-à-porteurs* from the terrace, for Lady Shortlands’ locomotion.

As they left the orangery Chatteris glanced back and thought how pretty the scene was, the sun slanting down through the glass, with renewed brilliancy, upon the variegated foliage of the creepers, and touching the golden fruits within their glossy leaves. Amid all the tumbled furniture and bustling people, Eugenia was to him as bright as one of these golden fruits, and

as sweet as one of their white blossoms on the warmed air. He felt that he should make a sonnet about her before his visit was over. And he did.

When the procession was accomplished, and they had borne Lady Shortlands back to the house, Eugenia went with her to her rooms, but did not trust herself to speak. She felt she was unreasonably wroth, and was aware that there had been a time (which lasted as a matter of fact until an hour before) when she would have been the first to speak ironically of her escapade. It would have had no meaning till now. She sent for Parfitt therefore, to minister to her aunt's manifold needs, and then she went to her own room to change her gown. But she never took much thought about her dressing, and when she entered the chapel-like chamber, all calm and burnished in the copious light, she sat down first at the altar table and let the freshened south-west air from

the open window play about her head. She was quite still for some minutes, though her heart beat hard ; then she rose suddenly, her lips parted, " Oh ! this pain," she said—" Oh ! this pain,—what is it ? "

There was no answer but the drip of the rain from the ivy and the honeysuckles and the roses at her window, and the call of a sheltered bird to its mate—sheltered safe from the weather.

She rose with a step weary for her, and walked to the window, like one overmastered by an impression, almost as if she had seen a spirit. As she stopped, she rested her left hand upon a table, on which lay an old, silver-framed mirror. Mechanically and against her wont, she took it up, and, standing in the flood of light, looked down at her reflected face. "*Is that I ?*" she thought. She did not smile, but she trembled ; at last she put down the glass and made no sign ; she seemed to have been weighing her beauty in a scale, for some one

else's sake, and to be doubtful still about her verdict. The look upon her features was one of fear ; a great awe had fallen upon her. Then, of a sudden, in that quiet room—henceforth indeed a chapel, consecrated utterly—she sank upon her knees down—lower—lower in an agony of prayer—

“Oh ! my God ! bless him, guard him, love him—not me but him—not me but him—Oh my God ! my God !”

It was not for Sir Edmund that she prayed.

THE END OF BOOK THE FIRST.



Book the Second.



LOVE, THE CROSS.

“ Listen, Eugenia,
How thick the bursts come crowding through the leaves !
Again, thou hearest ?
Eternal passion
Eternal pain.”

—MATTHEW ARNOLD.

CHAPTER I.

PROSPECT.

*“ THERE was a lady loved a swine ;
— ‘ Honey,’ said she,
‘ Pig, hog, wilt thou be mine ?’—
‘ Hunc,’ said he ! ”—*

Anne Jefferies was singing the next morning at the piano in her bedroom—not practising, for she seldom did anything methodically, but skimming some loose music, which was scattered through a Canterbury at her side. She was sitting in the sunshine, her dark face intent, at the moment, upon a little book of children’s songs—a drifted relic of babyhood—which the Tomlinsons had bought among the odds and ends at Ashbank, for these rooms had been the nurseries.

All of a sudden she called out to May, who was still dressing in the adjoining room, as sunny and as chintzy as her own : “ May,” she said, “ come here, and tell me what this song reminds you of ! ”

May came in, with her hair about her face, looking very pretty,—“ Isn’t it a heavenly morning, Anne ? ” she said, “ I thought our rooms were north, but they seem east enough to get all the early sun—which song ? ” And then Anne sang the verse again.

“ What a horrid song ! ” said May, “ it is nonsense, isn’t it ? ”

“ No, it isn’t ; ” said Anne, “ it is particularly good sense ; and it reminds me of Eugenia Brand and the monster, mother Shortlands calls ‘ Mr. Jones. ’ ”

“ What very strange ideas you do have, Anne—have you got any hairpins ? ”

“ What very strange things one sees—or doesn’t see if one is as dense as you are—”

returned Anne, pointing to the dressing-table. "Here you have them—I don't mean the hair-pins — Mr. Jones, or Jarvis, or whatever his eligible name may be, is 'the swine,' and Eugenia Brand is 'the lady.'"

"I don't see why you should call him a 'swine,'" said pretty May, as she put back her hair, not caring to trouble the head beneath it with Anne's similes, "but I grant you that Eugenia is a 'lady.' I think, Anne, she is the most glorious creature I have ever seen; look at her skin."

"You talk of her as if she were a rabbit," said Anne. "*She loves him! Aha!*" (this in a most melodramatic tone).

"Have you taken leave of your senses?" said May.

"No," said Anne, "they are here," (tapping her forehead), "seven of them, at least; it is your glorious Eugenia that has 'taken leave' of hers. But there! it's no use telling you

what I mean. Cut off to Celestine, and don't attempt even to do your own hair."

"Lunatic!" said May, but the hint that she was spoiling her curls sent her back to her own room.

Anne went on playing. "It would be a pity," she said to herself not ill-naturedly, "for she's a thousand-fold too good for him. If May won't do it, I must ; but I rather think she will."

Whence it may be perceived that the attraction of Eugenia to Mr. Arthur John Jarvis had not escaped Anne's vigilance, while, owing to something of the same attraction, differently answered, Miss May's blue eyes were a little blinded ; and in fact, the stalwart lieutenant, whom Mrs. Buxton had thought rather vulgar, and whom Mrs. Tomlinson had wished she could have replaced by "her friend Captain Molyneux—Lord George's son—who was on leave," bade fair to become somewhat of an apple of discord. (At the present moment he

was thinking so himself, as he lit his after-breakfast cigar downstairs ; “ Yours truly is in luck ! ” he would have said.)

As Anne sat playing, she reviewed the events of the previous evening. Sir Edmund had taken her in to dinner, Eugenia falling to Captain Boville, who seemed to make but little way with her, while Buck and Chatteris, in the momentary plethora of men, faced Crossley and Vane lower down the table where Mr. Tomlinson was immutably flanked by Lady Shortlands and Mrs. Buxton. Miss Jefferies, seated as she was between Lord Shortlands and Sir Edmund, had ample opportunity, owing to the deafness of the one and the abstractedness of the other, for watching Miss Brand, who was placed between Mr. Buxton and Boville and was thus in the full range of admiring glances from both Sir Edmund and Mr. Jarvis, who were sitting together on Anne’s side of the table. And, whether from being a little bored by Lord

Shortlands' deafness, or a little annoyed at Sir Edmund's pre-occupation, Anne had criticised Miss Brand with more than her usual care.

The special sign that she had noticed, had belonged to the same order as the symptoms that surprised Eugenia, in her own self. It was when Buck had inadvertently fallen into conversation with his "Honourable" neighbour Chatteris, and plunged into some literary or musical error, so glaring as to be past all hope of concealment or repair. She noticed then, that, in her deep distress, Eugenia had made efforts to engage Chatteris' attention, not hearing a word, meanwhile, that Captain Boville said to her, so that the worthy warrior had to take refuge in his impotent moustaches, wondering if it were she or he that was stupid. Nor would Eugenia answer Sir Edmund's amused glance; she had studiously avoided meeting his gaze till dinner was over; and in the evening, though she had not talked to

Buck, she had also kept away from Sir Edmund. In fact, though Anne had found the dinner dull, she had not found it uninteresting, and knew, by now, far better how things stood with the hearts concerned—the depths of two, at least, of which, she could not fathom—than their owners did. In her blunt way she was sorry for Sir Edmund, indignant with the hero, and determined to assist Miss Brand's simplicity with her own superior skill.

Being an active-minded young lady, and particularly heart-whole herself at this moment of time, Miss Jefferies did not despise a task of this kind, and she was pondering it over now, as she had pondered it on the preceding evening. Desultory music always assisted the workings of her mind. During the dinner, a wonderful foreign band had played, in the conservatories leading from the dining-room, some of the dance music for the following evening, and it had been perhaps the unconscious agent of her

thoughts ; and now, before she went down to breakfast, her own fingers accompanied her, as we have seen, while she thought out her project.

“ It was fortunate for ‘ the lady,’ ” concluded Anne aloud, as May came dressed into her room to ask her “ if she were going downstairs to-day or to-morrow ? ” — “ To-morrow certainly,” she replied, in a parenthesis, “ but very likely to-day too,” — “ fortunate for ‘ the lady ’ that the pampered ‘ swine ’ could say nothing but that monosyllable, else he would have committed himself as certainly as Mr. Jones did last night.”

“ I wish you would not call him, Mr. *Jones*, what did he do ? ”

“ *Jones* is quite good enough for him, my dear,—‘ Do ? ’ Oh ! nothing of any consequence ; only confused ‘ *Robert le diable* ’ with a horse of the name, or something like that.”

“ Well, and what did it matter ? ” said May, “ any one can see he knows nothing about music.”

“ ‘*What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?*’ ”

said Anne, pensive;—rather to May’s surprise she did not answer tartly—“ Yes, that is *really* the right point of view, but if you were to ask Miss Brand, you would find out that she thinks that it matters a great deal, and that it matters too that any one should laugh at him; and that he is, in point of fact, her ‘sacred Lama.’ But never you mind that! I mean to blaspheme against the sacred Lama all the same, and we’ll see what comes of it: the first result of my audacious blasphemy is a gigantic appetite.”

And so the two girls went downstairs, to find the great hall swept already—and partially garnished—for the dance to take place in the evening;—the gathering masses of flower and fern looking very radiant in the stream of sunlight upon the polished floor. It was a beautiful hall, this central one at Ashbank, from one side of which the great staircase

slanted up to its division beneath the blazoned window ; and its beauty never showed to such advantage as when it was, what Mrs. Tomlinson called, "stripped." The "stripping" process rid it of the rubbish its present owners had imported there,—Japanese satin screens, plush-covered tables and ormolu stands and frames—while it exposed to view the fine old tapestries, the armour and the carven seats. Nothing was left in it now more breakable than ebony or ivory or steel, and the daily furniture looked very valueless and trivial, pushed away into alcoves, while in process of being shelved and arranged in the other rooms. A mass of Chinese lanterns in a corner looked also like rubbish, compared with three great silver candelabra, black with age, that had been brought from some Moorish cathedral and were the glory of the hall in its intact days. The lanterns, however, were not yet hung, and would perhaps flaunt prettily in

the evening, when the mood of the guests was one of artificial light and evening dress.

But certainly the flowers would not show then to as complete advantage as now. Such tables as were not already removed, were literally hidden with a ruthless harvest of August roses : festoons of them were being strung across alcoves, and the vast fireplace was turned into a bower—trees full of blossom being bodily set there—while the ledges of the panelling were banked with tuberose and gardenia ; and hanging baskets shaped like Roman lamps—in which the case was all of stephanotis bloom, and the inner flame of a sort of exotic honeysuckle—were being fastened up the stairways and along the balustrade.

When the two girls came down into this carnival of flowers—the warm sunlight filling their nostrils with sweet moist scents of earth and moss—Anne sniffed approval, and May danced along the smooth and fragrant floor,

dispelling such loose stalks and scattered rose leaves as were not yet swept up, with the swirl of her little shoes. She was unable to contain herself for joy.

Crossing the hall they came upon Mrs. Tomlinson, standing amid a dozen gardeners, and holding up the rich skirts of her light silk dress—for Mrs. Tomlinson was never dressed appropriately. She looked bilious and depressed, and was very helpless, but she patted May's cheek affectionately with her disengaged hand. Everybody patted May's cheek, much as everybody touches or smells a sweet and hardy flower.

"Get out of this mess, dears," she said, in a heart-broken voice, "and go into the breakfast room; you are sure to find some one there, though, to be sure, I breakfasted an hour ago, and Miss Brand kept me company."

"How lovely it will all look!" said May, enraptured still.

“Do you think it *will*?” said Mrs. Tomlinson with a sigh, as if it were a funeral that she was planning. “Well! well! I think I’ve got more flowers than Lady Sophia had; and if not—we’re here to-day and gone to-morrow!”

“Oh! you’re not going to send us away to-morrow!” said Anne, pretending to take her literally, and she could not repress her smile, for which Mrs. Tomlinson liked her none the better. She had not yet quite “taken that Miss Jefferies’ measure.” So she trailed off along the hall, on the pretext of giving some order to her head-gardener, dragging a lot of boughs and twigs after her, and oversetting a small rose-tree with her train.

“Oh! the roses!” said a clear, full-toned voice behind her, as fresh as a bird’s song at morning; and Anne turned and saw Eugenia coming in from the conservatory, her hands full of starry crimson blossoms—passion-flower and poinsettia—followed closely by James Chatteris

with a load of bracken and bulrushes and moss. She wore a cotton dress like a housemaid's, but she did not look like a housemaid.

"At it again!" said Anne to May, as they passed into the breakfast-room, after bidding her "good morning;" but they looked in vain for either Sir Edmund or "the monster," to dis sever from Eugenia's company.

Sir Edmund was, indeed, reported to be less well, and, any way, it was not usual for him to have yet left his rooms; he was the only one who had suffered anything from the tropic weather, and he had telegraphed to London for his doctor, the previous afternoon, "less perhaps," suggested Anne, "from apprehension about his present ailment, than because he meant to dance with Miss Brand; and thought it well to have a doctor handy, in case of breaking anything more reparable than his heart."

As for Buck, he "couldn't stand a mess;" and was off, after a superb breakfast, to pass

the morning with his fellow-officers in smoking-room and stable.

Eugenia was not sorry ; she loved to handle flowers, and could now do so with her old undisturbed conscience, and she would have to divide her pleasant toil by dutiful incursions on her aunt at her *toilette*, as well as by these expeditions into the garden, with her new-found cousin, after some special flower or another. She looked forward to a very happy morning.

The gardeners were delighted at her useful interference and considerate taste, while, as for James Chatteris, he was in the seventh heaven by her side, in the radiant day. Only Mrs. Tomlinson was disposed to think "her style a little *sober*."

"Charming, my dear Miss Brand !" she said of the red flowers, "*just* the shade we wanted ;" (she would have said so, had Eugenia brought the calceolarias from the garden borders) "but

what *are* you going to do with those common ferns ?”

“Oh ! don’t you like them ?” said Eugenia disappointed, “look at the colours ;—and then the bulrushes, we took such pains to get them—so tall and strong ;—we thought of putting them round those scented fountains ;” she had too much kindness of heart to say, she thought the greenery would *conceal* the fountains.

“You were at Lady Sophia’s ball last season, were you not, Miss Brand ?” said Mrs. Tomlinson earnestly, as if (from the funereal point of view) she were recalling the last wish of the deceased.

“Yes, I was,” said Eugenia—“I thought it hideous.”

“Well, now,” said Mrs. Tomlinson, disregarding the comment in her anxiety, “had *she* ferns like these—*common* ferns ?”

“Oh, no !” said Eugenia laughing, “only hot-house flowers and forced things.”

“Then,” said Mrs. Tomlinson, with noble

resolution and a touch of proper pride, "*I* will have only hot-house flowers. Lady Sophia will be here to-night, and I cannot give her a loop-hole," (Mrs. Tomlinson's metaphors always confused her speech more than they enlightened it), "*I cannot* give her a loop-hole to say that I stinted hot-house flowers; bracken will *never do*," she concluded, looking at Eugenia with a glassy resolution in her eyes.

Eugenia did not answer her directly; she turned to James Chatteris instead. "I am so sorry you had the trouble of getting these for me," she said, though she could not but be aware that her thanks repaid him; "and the bulrushes too; I am still sorrier that we cut *them*; Mrs. Tomlinson is quite right; they deserve the beauty of the river."—Which was not at all what Mrs. Tomlinson had meant.

James Chatteris did not care what was done with the bracken or the bulrushes, now that he had exhausted the pleasure of cutting them

under Eugenia's eyes, and he said so very prettily, "The tints of the fern are lovely," he added timidly, "Could you not put one little frond of it among the flowers in your dress to-night, for cousinship?—it is very Scottish," he finished with his shy smile.

"Wait, and see what I will do for cousinship!" said Eugenia, delighted with a thought that struck her; and, giving the poinsettias to the gardeners, she took the bracken from Chatteris' hands. "I will put it in my own room," she added, glancing with pity at a mass of beautiful stems, thrown down amid the refuse, "I cannot bear it to be trampled on, like these."

She turned to go up the broad stairway, with her load of green and gold, just as the three officers crossed the hall from beneath it, on their way from the smoking-room to the front door. They stood still and looked at her with admiration, as well they might. Buck was last of the three, and least sus-

ceptible to the charm of the picture. He saw at once that it was Eugenia, and he thought he would "fetch" her.

"Ahem!" he said loudly, in a tone that made Mrs. Tomlinson start.

"Good gracious me! Mr. Jarvis, how you made me jump!" she said: it was just the sort of joke Mrs. Tomlinson understood. "Boys will be boys," she would say.

Eugenia did not "jump;"—she was past that stage of feeling when Buck's presence could surprise her—but she flushed hotly beneath her shady hat, behind the swaying bracken, which she held before her. "Good-morning!" she said, acknowledging the officers' greeting rather coldly, but when she met Buck's eyes, her own grew dewy, and she smiled. You would have said that Boville and Crossley had given her offence, not Jarvis: and so indeed they had; their offence was that they were there: such is the divine unreasoning of love.

Buck certainly was a fine fellow enough in the summer weather; he had another new suit on, which happened by a wonderful chance to become him, and his robust look made the flowers appear trifling, much as they do to farmers in the cornfield hedgerows. His friends moreover set him off, for though their private verdict would have been that he was a crude specimen of *them*, the fact remained that he was, to adopt a French expression, “more Buck Jarvis than they were.” They put some rosebuds in their buttonholes, but Buck—not from any distaste for roses, but because it would be a bore, and his buttonholes were new—stuck a clove-carnation into his mouth instead, and began chewing the stalk of it as he looked up at Eugenia. He was rather disposed to plume himself on his unchallenged impertinence.

—“Morning!” he said, “you’re going it; are you coming out for a stroll?”

“Not yet,” said Eugenia, stroking some of the sun-scented bracken with her white hands.

“Going to wait for another shower?” he said, in a lower tone, coming right up under the balustrade, and looking hard at her with his grey eyes, as he showed his square white teeth in a smile. It was his notion of flirting; and he flattered himself he was “making the running.”

Eugenia did not answer; she had no notions of flirting, and what May Buxton would have called “cheek” was something new to her, something not yet in her experience. His ways were really rather vulgar ways and meant little; to Eugenia they seemed impassioned and meant everything. She stood on the stairway above him, in her light dress—one foot on a higher step than the other—and the bracken cast its shadows over her, from knee to chin. You might have sculptured her for Proserpine or Ruth. She did not answer, but she looked down at his face, and her beauty gave the look

a significance in itself, that a plainer woman would have had to put into words.

“We weren’t so badly off there, were we?” he said presently, for he saw that Crossley’s eye was upon him and was determined to seem intimate with Eugenia, though her silence did not reassure him. He chuckled nervously.

“No,” she said at last, “I hope you did not catch a cold?” and then, looking at his giant strength, she was amused at the question she had asked him, and she laughed.

“No I didn’t,” he answered, quite at his ease again, “I didn’t feel the rain at all, you know.”

“Didn’t you?” said Eugenia, without the least notion that he was blundering over a compliment, “you must be a most impervious person.” There was a caress in her voice which she could not keep out of it, and it surprised herself.

“Oh! am I?” said Buck, putting his arms upon the balustrade. “No! but, I mean, *we*

were so—snug—between those pillars—weren't we?"

Had a thunderbolt fallen at her feet, Eugenia could not have been more paralytically at a loss for a suitable reply. "Oh," she began, with unmitigated surprise and uncontrollable amusement shining in her frank eyes. "Oh, *snug!*"—and then, finding no sort of answer she could even try to make, she fairly burst out laughing.

When Eugenia laughed, which was seldom, and never so thoroughly as when the laugh was against herself, you could not help laughing too. Mrs. Tomlinson shook her belaced head and laughed with her, against her own will, and then waggled off with something of the unexpressed comment about her walk, "Young people will be young people." And Crossley and Boville grinned, though they would have been mightily surprised at Miss Brand, if they had heard the joke, and even

the gardeners smiled (in their sleeves), and just then Anne and May came out of the deserted breakfast-room, and as they exchanged greetings with Chatteris, the laughter was so infectious that they caught it too. And the best of it was that none of them had a notion that the joke was just a piece of insolence, which Eugenia should have been the first to resent, and of which Buck was a little bit ashamed already.

He hastened to change the subject ; and the way in which he did so was an instance of his fine consideration for his hostess. “Now, then!” he shouted, as soon as Mrs. Tomlinson’s trailing skirts were out of sight, and while she was still perilously within earshot—“when the cat’s away . . . !” and, taking a pile of loose lovely rose-blossoms from a table where they were ranged in order for decoration, he pelted them, one after another, as fast as he could fling them, in his heavy-handed way, at Boville and Crossley.

“Very humorous ;” said Anne trenchantly, as the great red and white blossoms shed their leaves over the young men’s coats in the skirmish ; for the two officers were not a whit behindhand in returning at least the leafless centres.—“If I were Mrs. Tomlinson, Mr. Jarvis, I should make you pay for those roses, at so much a dozen, as you’d have to for sticks at Aunt Sally.”

“I’d have a—shy at the—old Aunt Sally—herself, if she—did !” he guffawed spasmodically, ducking to dodge a stalk, and seizing another handful.

It was altogether not an exhibition of taste ; and the head-gardener, who chanced to be at hand, looked grave ; though the younger ones stared with their mouths wide open at such bold fun. To see Buck use their roses so, made them foolishly ashamed of themselves for being gardeners.

“Now sir !” said the chief functionary

sternly, in a tone he would certainly not have used to Sir Edmund, "if you gentlemen wants to bally-rag, you'd better just take yourselves off into them playgrounds of your'n."

Crossley and Boville laughed, and Crossley cried: "You've got it now, old man!" for in truth, Buck was much more crestfallen than he had been at Anne's rebuke. With a weak attempt at rebellion, he made as if he would shy the last rosebud at the grave gardener's head; but as that personage was far too well accustomed to the control of romps, to duck, he thought better of that, and flung it, with much gesture, to alight amid Eugenia's bracken. His notion of "sport" would have been that she should toss it back to him, his notion of flirting that she should "stick it in her hat." But, Eugenia being Eugenia and the rosebud being a rosebud, she did neither: she laid it carefully among the

fern-leaves, where it fell. There were no more roses left upon the table, so perforce the game was over, and she went upstairs, just finding some sufficient answer to excuse her from tennis for a while. Her aunt furnished her with a valid pretext for engagement.

But, as she deposited the bracken in her room, before going to Lady Shortlands, she disengaged the rosebud from its fronds and stood holding it in her hand for a moment. It was a common rosebud after all, and Eugenia had passed leisure days enough in the country and with old-fashioned people, to know the language of flowers: "Cabbage-rose," she said to herself softly, "Ambassador of Love."

It was crushed and bruised;—the leaves half pressed from the stem—she did not kiss it with her lips, but her eyes kissed it; she did not even put it into water; she saw that it was killed. Eugenia was not one to do

girlish or jerky things. But she laid it reverently down, upon the old lace cover of her dressing-table, and her hands lingered on it as she did so ; it seemed as if there were a spirit in the flower ; she looked at it and sighed. If Buck had seen her look at it and sigh, he might have wondered, he could not have understood.

“ He would have used then all the worse, had they been birds instead of flowers,” she said ; but she did not hate him. “ He does not know,” she said ; “ he does not know—Ambassador of Love.” Often, perhaps, our life is changed for us, by some no greater thing ; and to Eugenia—in her present altered mood—the rosebud, however roughly sent, was a mysterious emblem. There is something to be said for her. In old Florentine days, as we see them on canvas, and in our own later painters’ imaging of them, this rose-pelting is accounted beautiful. We do not call it “ bally-ragging,”

when we see it pictured there ; and surely the play of it, with its interchange of glance and laughter, suits the roses better far than being ranged in cornice, out of reach and smell, as we range them in ball-rooms now. To be tender-hearted over flowers is, after all, the outcome only, of our "pathetic fallacy ;" Buck was as careful of them as the Florentines ; but then Eugenia had been educated up to the "pathetic fallacy." As regards birds, she had not only declined to enter the enclosure at Hurlingham (as many may, to spare their nerves), but even to make the acquaintance of a handsome and successful shot, who had asked leave to be presented to her there one Saturday. But she did not hate Buck, and she made allowances for him.

What a morning it was ! soft airs seemed to be blowing all over the house, wherever the sunlight fell—and where did it not fall ? And

yet, though there was cool after the storm, there was no breath of wind stirring. It was only open doors and windows and hurrying feet that fanned the stillness; every flight of stairs and every corridor ran over with preparation and life.

Eugenia went into her aunt's apartments. There, too, preparation was going on, though vitality was at a low ebb. Lady Shortlands was being "done up for the day."

"Come in," she said sharply, as Eugenia knocked at the panel. "Come in, and put the curtain down over the door, or the draught will blow my wig off." The old lady never spared herself, if she was invariably hard on others; but she rather tempered her self-depreciation. Her niece knew, as all the world did, that she wore false hair, but she did not know of the rouge and the cosmetiques, increasing day by day, which were Parfitt's secret care.

Eugenia went in, the meridian glory of her

beauty shining like light in the closely shut-up room smelling of drugs and perfumes.

“Well,” said Lady Shortlands looking up at her with a grudging admiration, “and how may you please to find yourself to-day?” There was a note of battle in her voice; something was evidently amiss, and Eugenia forbore a literal answer. Then the charge came at once. “Do you remember why I brought you here?” said the old lady, always inflammable enough, and working herself up into a great rage, “do you think it was to moon about in the rain with a man in a bathing-dress, leaving me to catch my death of cold—not that it matters, of course, what happens to me, so long as you’re amused? Oh! you won’t answer me before Parfitt, won’t you? Well, miss, I can just tell you, for your peace of mind, Parfitt knows my views already”—this was an untruth, told partly to annoy Eugenia, and partly to conciliate Parfitt, who was really

quite in the dark as to the origin of "Miladi's tantrums"—"and Parfitt agrees with me. And now, Parfitt, stick me on my best wig, and leave us: I want Miss Brand to write some notes for me."

But, when Parfitt was gone, it turned out that Lady Shortlands—who loved to bamboozle her maid—had no notes to be written. She wanted to appeal to Eugenia about Sir Edmund Trefusis. Ah! if it had only been the previous morning.—

"Now," she said, with her usual frankness, "you generally look extremely well at a ball, Eugenia, and I confess I feel that I shall soon get bored here—one always does at this sort of house, there's no real company—I want you to *settle it to-night*. You know what I mean; the occasion will be a good one, and we can make short work of this visit."

Eugenia was too much distressed to answer at once: after a minute, she said, "Sir Edmund Trefusis is not well, he is hardly likely to

appear at the ball. He sent yesterday to London for his own doctor." To Eugenia, sending for the doctor implied that there was immediate danger, and she had felt surprise that Mrs. Tomlinson, who was accustomed to Sir Edmund's chronic ill-health, had not seemed more put out about it. Lady Shortlands, however, shared Mrs. Tomlinson's view of his "fancies."

"Pooh!" she said, "he's nervous, that's what's the matter with him: he's worrying himself and he will worry himself until it's over. *I* want it settled too. I'm not well, and, I tell you, I must get away. If he can't come downstairs you must go up and sit with him and the doctor, and manage it so."

"How can you say such things?" said Eugenia, who could not believe her aunt in earnest, and indeed the old lady was half laughing through her anger: "If he proposed to me to-night, Aunt Agatha, I could not accept him."

Lady Shortlands put down her hand-glass and absolutely glared at her niece.

“Why the deuce not?” she said.—One of Lady Shortlands’ first rules in conversation was that there was but one vocabulary, whether for men or women.

Eugenia did not answer: words never scared her.

“Now, look here,” her aunt went on, “Sir Edmund Tre-thingummytight is poetical. You don’t understand poetry, but I do”—the reproach and the assertion were alike strange as from Lady Shortlands to Eugenia.—“Remember Romeo and Juliet and all the rest of them. *You* have a cold nature: you cannot realise falling in love at sight; *he* does. Take my word for it, Sir Edmund is the man for your money, or rather—for remember, you haven’t got any money—you’re the woman for his.”

Lady Shortlands leaned back after this *tirade*,

prepared for open rebellion on Eugenia's part, but oddly enough, as she thought, Eugenia still said nothing. She stood looking out of the window : across the lawns she could see the statues of Diana and Endymion at the end of the cypress-alley. Her aunt's words sounded strangely in her ears—"a cold nature—you don't understand poetry—you cannot realise love at sight." She was thinking of the cabbage-rosebud in her room, "Ambassador of Love:" its scent was in her nostrils yet. She could not argue.

"I begin to imagine," said Lady Shortlands gravely, changing her tone, as she traced the coronet and initials on her ivory brushes with a shaky be-ringed old hand, "that you are *wanting*, Eugenia Brand,—wanting—daft."

Eugenia laughed : she thought perhaps she was.

—"Is there any just cause or impediment—barring the irons, which I believe to be remov-

able—why you should not let Sir Edmund love you? None. And is there any need for you to trouble your poor silly head about loving *him*? None.—You don't dislike him, do you?"

"Oh no! indeed," said Eugenia, indignant with herself. "He has been so kind, so thoughtful; I have found his company delightful."

"I am sure you have. You were a fool to play off that young savage against him—and I think, lost ground. Men like Sir Edmund are particular"—

(Eugenia was not listening; she was thinking with contrition—"dislike him?" had she been rude—unkind?—and he was ill.)

—"Well, make amends! you can't have everything. Why, my dear," the old lady went on in a gentler voice, looking at Eugenia's perplexed face, "the same blood runs in your veins that runs in mine. Did I think I loved my old Lord? Not I! And if it didn't heat

me so to talk, I could tell you a long tale against myself, which—as it is—you must make your mother tell you some day. ‘Somebody else?’ of course I loved somebody else; and I thought at the time that there was *nobody* else like that *somebody* else, in the world. And would you believe it, Eugenia, I woke up Shortlands last night, to try and help me remember what that somebody else’s name was?—not that I’d forgotten him, but my memory has played me curious tricks of late.—‘Shortlands,’ I said, ‘what was the name of that young *buck*, as you used to call him, that I loved when I married you?’ Why, what’s ‘the matter, Eugenia, *you* tired?’”

Eugenia had sat down suddenly, at a certain idle little word; that was all.

“Tell me about it, Aunt Agatha,” she said with her first show of interest.

“I can’t,” said the old lady, after a pause, and with a stifled sigh. “I suppose I was

more of a fool than most people. And that's why I asked you if there were any 'just cause or impediment,' Eugenia ; for even after all these years of marriage—happy marriage, as things go, and successful life—I don't think I should urge you, if I thought you had ever cared for somebody else, like that."

"Does it never change?" said Eugenia, in a low sweet voice.

"Never," said Lady Shortlands, almost in the same tone. "One may not remember always, *but it is always there*. I've forgotten his name, I tell you, but that makes no odds : if he could come into this room now—he can't : he's dead, poor darling—though I'm past sixty, I should blush through my —" (she was going to say "rouge," but she stopped herself in time, and substituted)—"wrinkles. However, you, thank God, have nothing of that kind to think of ; so look your best at the ball, and don't let things slide. And now

I've talked myself purple, so get along, and send me that wretched woman, Parfitt, again. It's twelve o'clock, and she's got her work cut out for her if she's to make me fit to go downstairs to luncheon."

How was it that, despite her aunt's first harshness, Eugenia went up to her before she left the room, and, for the first time in her whole life, kissed her tenderly, of her own free will? Let those guess who do not know; for surely those who do, will never be quite able to put it into words. It touched her deeply to find that this worldly old woman had gone through that same phase of passion which was overwhelming all her senses. She would almost have confided in her aunt; but what was there yet, that she could affirm or claim? What was she to Arthur Jarvis? Nothing: although it seemed that every fibre of her heart and brain now wove itself about him. She must wait.

She went down the broad staircase, like a woman in a dream. As she passed Sir Edmund's apartments, she saw that his doors were open; and in the luxurious Persian sitting-room, a tall, dark-bearded man was seated at a table, writing busily. As she descended into the hall, she heard the sound of a piano from the music-room. It was Anne's crisp touch; and Eugenia, in her perplexity, was more disposed to listen to the playing than to go out of doors. She turned in the direction of the room whence the sound issued, taking her hat off, as she did so, with her habitual gesture.

She found herself in a small ante-chamber that communicated with the larger room, but was separated from it by silken curtains. In this small room Sir Edmund was *perdu*, under a vast oriel window, listening abstractedly to the music. Eugenia was surprised to see that he was looking quite as well as on

the preceding day ; but, as she did not like to tell him that she had been apprehensive, she said only : “ Good morning.”

“ I am eavesdropping, you see,” he said, “ and I have made a discovery—such a discovery in a country house, like finding wild flowers in the sea!—Miss Jefferies is a musician. We know that she can sing and play—oh, yes! but she is more than an artist—she is a musician, ‘with a capital M.’ She is ‘nothing if not a Musician!’ ”

Eugenia smiled and signalled to him to speak lower, that she might listen.

“ She *thinks to music*,” Sir Edmund went on, “ is not that rare? Will you sit down here, by me, and let me tell you what she thinks about? She is thinking about *you*.”

Eugenia shook her head and lifted her eyebrows, with a gentle incredulity.

“ You are *distracte*, this morning,” he said, “ and you do not care ; but yes! she is think-

ing about you. Oh! I know it is Bach; but listen, and learn what all that interweaving means to her. She is not playing from notes, but from memory; she stops now and then, but it is not forgetfulness that makes her stop, it is interest. She is absorbed, but, at this moment, it is not with the music, or she would do it more artistic justice. The thread of its noble strain is but the symbol of the noble life of which she thinks. Hark! how it goes on, finding its way amid the puzzledom—making light in the dark places. I know she is thinking of you.”

Eugenia listened, but her face looked grave. She was sitting by Sir Edmund, on the window-seat, beneath the stained glass panes, and he took her hat out of her hands.

“You are like the monk, in the Ingoldsby legends,” he said, “that carried his head about with him.”

“Hats, with me,” said Eugenia, “are a con-

cession to Fashion; and you see how little pleased Fashion must be with my taste."

Sir Edmund looked at the hat: "It *is* very ugly," he said, "but I like it: I like the clothes of people that I—— And so, you are very poor?"

"'Are you honest, are you fair?'" said Eugenia, quoting. She was amused at the impertinence of a question which somehow was not impertinent. "Yes, I am poor."

"And you are very 'honest' and you are very 'fair,' I know," said Sir Edmund.

Eugenia looked vexed: she had not meant him to take her so. Since the first moment of their meeting, she had found herself alone with Sir Edmund more than once, and she liked talking to him. But now she thought him hard to answer. This last speech fortunately did not need reply, and she maintained her golden silence. He saw that she was embarrassed, and, with a sudden change of manner, he asked:

“Is Lady Shortlands better this morning?”

“Better?” said Eugenia, whose embarrassment was changed to surprise; “she is much as usual. I have only this moment left her.”

“She is ill,” said Sir Edmund quickly, after a pause: “I do not think she will live long, and I think she is aware of it.”

“What do you mean, Sir Edmund?”

“I have observed;” he answered gravely, “I am very observant; there are moments when she does not know where she is, when her existence flickers.”

Eugenia recalled what her aunt had said to her about her memory. “She has not been well for some time past,” she said slowly, “she has had rheumatism,—gout, she calls it,—and she is weak.”

“It is more than that,” he said. “Yesterday afternoon, I was alarmed—I hope, idly. I was coming across the room after dinner to speak to you, but you seemed to avoid me.”—

Eugenia turned her face aside, to hide its mantling flush : she knew that she had done so, and she remembered the reason.

“ I do not know Lady Shortlands well,” he went on, “ and she may be habituated to these attacks ; but it is good to be on guard—on *our* guard,” he added, looking at Eugenia, and conscious of the sweetness that he tasted, in linking her name with his, but she was too pre-occupied to notice this.

“ Did you say anything to my uncle about it ? ” she asked.

“ Nothing ; it would distress him ; *it does not distress you in the least.* ”

“ No,” said Eugenia, glad to have an opportunity of confessing to him an insensibility that she resented in herself. “ I wish it did ! I envy you your quick sympathy ; I suppose I am selfish ; few things disquiet me. I don’t understand pain (—I have told you this already, and I wonder that you do not hate me—) ; I

think there are natures for which illness might be repose."

"*But not death;*" said Sir Edmund, in a yet graver tone than he had used.

Eugenia was much moved: "You do not think"—she said, turning pale, and then she paused.

"Keep counsel!" he answered her gently; "after luncheon, we shall know better if my fears are founded. I have sent for my own doctor, in whom I have the greatest faith. He is a young man, and it will not seem strange that he should like to stay for the dance, if there be any real cause for anxiety. Mrs. Tomlinson, of course, will ask him to remain. I have begged him to observe Lady Shortlands without seeming to do so. He is here already."

"Oh!" said Eugenia suddenly, laying her hand upon his arm, and thrilling him unconsciously with the magic of her touch, "*is that* why you have sent for him? I am so glad. I

had been so afraid it was because you were ill yourself!"

It was a charming utterance, had he dared to take it literally; but he saw, too clearly, that it seemed to mean more than Eugenia had intended; he knew that, had she cared intensely, she could not have spoken with so much freedom. Still she *did* care. And he felt proud and happy.

"I wish it had been only that," he said; "but I am better."

"And it was from anxiety about my aunt?" said Eugenia, "how kind and thoughtful you are! I don't think ever any one was half so good"—

"It was from anxiety"—he answered her, with a deep meaning in his tone—"for you." . . .

Suddenly Anne's music ceased with a bang, and her clear voice rang oddly after its intricacies.

“I thought that you were never coming back!” she said impatiently to May, who had just joined her, and then she went on softly playing the nursery rhyme with one finger, but neither Eugenia nor Sir Edmund recognised it.

“Oh! one of mamma’s lectures on deportment,” said May’s fresh tones in answer, “and to try on my stockings for to-night.”

“Perhaps I had better listen no more, I am shy of *stockings*,” said Sir Edmund, with a smile; but there were no reciprocal confidences about dress. Anne never knew anything about her clothes, till her maid had fastened them upon her; and she took still less interest, if possible, in other people’s.

Anyway they could not help hearing the rest, for May came up so close to the silk curtain that it rustled against the arch between the rooms, at the end of the window-seat where Sir Edmund and Eugenia sat. She had advanced to the piano and was standing behind her cousin.

“What have you been playing?” she asked.
“Bach? I want you to come out now.”

Anne’s fingers were still busy with the teasing nursery rhyme. She was making it into a little *fugue* now. “There was a lady”—sang the treble: “was a lady”—echoed the bass.

“Oh, Anne! that eternal tune! you don’t mean to say that you are still thinking of Eugenia Brand?”

Sir Edmund and Eugenia started; the question was such a sudden and distinct verification of what he had said to her that they were both amazed.

“Hush,” she said to him; “now for my punishment! ‘Listeners never hear any good of themselves.’”

“Well, at that moment,” said Anne, rising and shutting the piano, “I confess I was thinking more of that pig, ‘Mr. Jones.’”

Sir Edmund’s interpretation was thoroughly spoiled, as far as he could tell.

“I was wrong indeed,” he said, laughing, for it did not occur to him who “Mr. Jones” was.

But Eugenia knew ; and she knew also that Sir Edmund’s surmise had been right.

CHAPTER II.

HUMAN.

PRETTY as the old hall had looked in its sunny morning disarray, when all the beauty and the freshness of the flowers were discernible, its effect was still prettier at nine o'clock in the evening when the decorations were complete, the swept floor shining and the many lanterns, as well as the old silver lamps and candelabra, adding brilliancy to the scene.

Out of doors, the night was of a wonderful deep blue, studded with "patient stars;" indoors, you were dazzled with a light more bright than day's, which made you blink as you passed into its glow, from beneath the heavily brocaded *portières*. The short strip

of vestibule which you first entered, with the morning-rooms on either side of it reserved for hats and cloaks, was crowded with statuary and scented fountains, but when you had stooped under the last lifted curtain, the great hall was before you, black-floored, and gleaming, in its emptiness, like a frozen lake in winter.

Not that there was any chance of mistaking the season ; for roses were massed against the tapestry panels and round the pictures, were banked along the galleries, festooned beneath the alcoves, and wreathed about the suits of armour, with a lavishness to make the Lady Sophia of Mrs. Tomlinson's envy confess herself royally outdone.

But, despite flowers and lights, the *ensemble* was sombre at first ; the big organ and the Moorish lamps held their own against the wreaths and muslin ; and the old portraits of worthies, that had known neither Tomlinson

nor Chinese lanterns, seemed to frown down upon the hall possessively still. By and bye, the organ would be hidden from sight by the red and gold of the regimental band—which was mustering in the gallery before it with much whispered approval of the scene, settling of stands for music and furtive essays of sound—and the pictured faces would cease to be observed, behind the steam and din; but when nine o'clock struck, there was nobody to dispute their rights, except Mr. Buxton and his host, who were standing at the foot of the staircase, looking—according to your mood—like two mutes or two butlers, eschewing the polished boards and measuring out the length of the hall with complacent and admiring eyes.

Not that Mr. Buxton, in his insular self-restraint, would ever have dreamed of expressing that he thought it fine. When the ball was over, he would find fault with some-

thing, and if his censure were but slight Mrs. Tomlinson would know that her ball had been perfect in the estimation of others. Mr. Buxton was as critical as he was punctual.

“Shortlands is ageing—” he said, in his heavy magisterial tone; well aware that Mr. Tomlinson, having only known Lord Shortlands within the last year, was quite unqualified to give an opinion.

“Yes,” said kind Mr. Tomlinson, nervously; “yes—h’m—I’m sorry for that—sorry for that—” Mr. Tomlinson was much more at his ease with young people than with Mr. Buxton, except when model cottages and farms were the matters under consideration.

“Well!” argued Mr. Buxton, with a grand air, as if he were putting into shape the probabilities of modern politics, in his own town-hall—he was as prosy an old person as was ever returned for a county; but, lacking courage to speak at St. Stephens, he said

his say in South Hampshire).—"Well! what have we? We have the Dunfarrell constitution, it is true, but then we have port wine—port wine unlimited, and—at Shortlands—bad."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Tomlinson considerably impressed, "*have we? bad?*"

"Bad;" said Mr. Buxton; "don't you think so?"

Now Mr. Tomlinson had never been to Shortlands; and, as we know, it was a contingent invitation thither, for Christmas, that had lured Mrs. Tomlinson to lend Lady Shortlands her aid, in furthering her views for Eugenia's future: but this invitation she had not yet mentioned to her husband, so that, at Mr. Buxton's abrupt question, he was rather nonplussed—"good easy man"—and began to be surprised at his own hospitality to people who had not yet invited him.

But his wife, as usual, came to his aid, Mrs.

Tomlinson—*en peignoir*—appearing round the corner of the stairway and answering for him : “ Fie, Mr. Buxton ! ” she said, “ you are taking advantage of his Lordship’s deafness, and you forget how sharp *her* ears are. *Nothing* is bad at Shortlands, and we are *so* looking forward to our Christmas there ; the Durhams will be there the *whole* week—astonishing for them to Christmas out. Mr. Tomlinson, just go round and look at the *buffets* and say if you don’t think so *many* gardenias may possibly spoil appetite.”

The obedient husband glided off in surprised delight, and left Mrs. Tomlinson decidedly mistress of the field.

Nor could the visit be further discussed, for Lord Shortlands was coming downstairs already, and joined Mr. Buxton in his survey at this moment.

“ Well, well ! ” he said, for he was the most good-natured of old gentlemen, and too ready

to praise, to mind not hearing other folks' opinions, "This is pretty:"—Lord Shortlands said "pooty:"—"shows what money can do, eh Buxton?"—Lord Shortlands forgot sometimes, that others were not as deaf as he was, and thought aloud;—"money, and taste, Mrs. Tomlinson—and taste of course. No, one would need to ask who's the taste was, who looked at your dress, eh?"—Mrs. Tomlinson was at present in her dressing-gown.—"Well! 'pon my soul—'pon my soul, I'm glad my poor lady's coming down to your party:"—Lord Shortlands said "porty."—"She was very unwell after dinner—hates a scrambled dinner, at odd hours, puts her out terribly—" this was a thought:—"not so young as we were, eh?"—this was a speech proper;—"but still delighted with it all—de-ligh-ted! 'Go to bed like a sensible woman,' I said to her: not she! likes to see how it's all done, you know, look at the natives, pick 'em to pieces; *she* sees

faults where nobody else does,"—these were thoughts—"see the pooty frocks,"—this was a speech proper, again, in compliment to Mrs. Tomlinson's dressing-gown:—"see the niece land her big fish, eh?"—this was another thought,—“help play the ironmonger—lives for that! see that done—die happy! Ah! Mrs. Tomlinson,”—ending with a speech proper—"no daughters, no nieces! . . . No," he added to his obtuse old self, but by this time fortunately he had crossed the hall to admire some flowers, and Mrs. Tomlinson was wandering upstairs, with an instinct to avoid seeing his involuntary *glissades* upon the polished floor, "no daughters, no nieces, no father, no mother, *nobody*: and can't, for the life of us, make out where the Jubbers came from—'the jub-jub birds' my lady calls them—jujubes eh? *jujubes*—not bad for me!—Why, Buxton, this will cost a thousand pounds!"

Mr. Buxton nodded his head violently, but

did not attempt to answer. Conversation with Lord Shortlands had been voted impossible except through the *media* of Eugenia Brand and Anne Jefferies, both of whom he contrived to hear. But he did not mind about it; if you heard what he said, so much the better,—you gave him starting points,—but if you did not, he talked about what he fancied you liked. Sometimes he was right and sometimes he was wrong. He had been known to light upon your pet aversion, and there were sundry good stories afloat about his want of judgment. For instance, when set on, once, to talk to the portly and prosperous composer of a famous *cantata*, he had persisted in taking him for a farmer and beginning each fresh clause of his talk with the prefixes “Cattle, eh?” and “*àpropos* of fat cattle;” which had not commended him to the musician.

In society, a frank deafness like this, when

accompanied by loquacity, acts like a necessitous looking-glass :—you cannot help seeing the sort of figure you make :—and it was noticeable that people liked or disliked Lord Shortlands, according as their manner and appearance were the true index to their tastes. Mr. Buxton, for instance, liked Lord Shortlands, because his own appearance connoted more intelligence than he really had. He was a man of what is called a ‘fine presence,’ and when he had uttered a platitude he looked as if he had formulated a philosophy, —Lord Shortlands, who felt he would have to talk up to the philosopher, would avoid him then—but when he was silent, he merely had the air of being wealthier and wiser than he was, and then Lord Shortlands would approach him, with a deferential reference to politics or the value of land. Both his lordship and Mr. Buxton were shallow men, but the shallowness of the former deceived no one :

it was constantly gauged by Lady Shortlands. Any false claim to depth would have been futile from him ; whereas Mrs. Buxton, partly from incapability and partly from a wish to save trouble, had a sort of belief in her husband's judgment, and persuaded him to his own depth.

Presently these two rather tiresome people were joined by James Chatteris, who did not smoke with the officers and his patron Vane, and required no after-dinner rest like Sir Edmund Trefusis. He had been wandering through the reception-rooms, and out at the back of the house, on to a terrace lit with countless lanterns and overlooking the illuminated shore. He was amazed at the magnitude of Mrs. Tomlinson's preparations, being himself of an austere Scotch stock, that asked its neighbours to dance at Christmas - time without more decoration than evergreens ;—pushing aside the old-fashioned furniture and letting

first one and then another sit down to the piano. He did not realise that all this pomp was simply emulous, but he was wondering why, amid so much light and beauty, he did not feel brighter. Perhaps he wanted the music to begin, perhaps he wanted Eugenia. As he passed through the library he had actually reached down a book, and read several pages of grave poetry; and then he had turned over in his mind some lines for a projected sonnet of his own; for James Chatteris mostly read poetry before he wrote any. It was to be about Eugenia, of course, and it was to end:

"As these gay lanterns to a midnight star."

He was quite sure of that—quite sure that she would look and shine like a star, among the guests—yes! that was it—

*". . . the guests that are
As these gay lanterns to that midnight star."*

He admired the contrasted pronouns, and

was tasting them in his mouth, like wine, when he stumbled up against Lord Shortlands and Mr. Buxton. It occurred to him, with one of those jerks of common-sense, which often beset composition, that they were neither of them in the least like "gay lanterns;" and the creation of the sonnet was hindered. These pauses before a festivity, which are really only pauses for some half-dozen people, often curiously influence these half-dozen people's moods. To Chatteris it seemed as if all were over, instead of just about to begin, as if the hour were a solemn one and the place sacred. A church-bell would not have jarred upon his feelings. He forgot that most of the guests were, long ago, upon their way—for country neighbours are punctual people—that, upstairs, the maids' hands were busy with their mistresses' "last touches," that, downstairs, cooks and scullions, footmen and grooms were leaping in the heat,

like salamanders, and that even in this "vasty hall" the stillness was only the breathing space before a shout.

And so he looked sad and rather pale, poor boy, and he was not reassured by hearing the officers as they came along a corridor from the smoking-room, laugh heartily at a joke of Vane's of which he was the butt, and which surmised that he had run off, after dinner, to get Lady Shortlands' maid to "put a peacock's feather in his button-hole." They did not perceive him, and went bounding up a back staircase, to change their gay smoking-jackets for their dress-coats again. The lull had no significance for them.

Next, Anne came down ; quite careless that she was the only lady yet upon the scene, and, glad to find some one besides Lord Shortlands and Mr. Buxton—whom she hated and always spoke of as her "aunt's husband"—she was unusually civil to Chatteris.

“Don’t ask me to dance,” she said, “or I shall have to go upstairs again! I didn’t come down early for that, but my aunt has gone into May’s room to give her a ‘Mother’s last word’—it’s a *trap*, not a *tract*—so I slipped out of my room, before she came to an ‘Aunt’s advice’ which is also of the series . . . Yes: it is a pretty gown I suppose. I mostly choose red — generally this particular red — like a pomegranate flower: I always think I am too old for white. Oh! don’t deny it: I have felt too old for white, ever since my lamentable failures, as a baby, to keep my long frocks uncrumpled.”—

“Don’t you feel exactly as if you were going to a funeral?” said Chatteris, who sometimes impressed people with his paradoxes, but oftener aired them in ungenial atmosphere.

“No, I don’t;” said Anne, who despised them: “I don’t go to funerals in red: I feel as if I were going to a ball, or rather as if a

ball were coming to me. Don't be angry! I know what you mean—it's indigestion, from dining an hour too early. Let's go up to the gallery and see what the band is going to play. I know the conductor and he always does just as I tell him. We will have 'Chantilly' twice;”—and she proceeded to take up one of Mrs. Tomlinson's elaborately-blazoned and superfluous programmes, and to bend her sleek head over it, with a view to its entire regeneration.

“Do you know,” said Chatteris timidly, “what Miss Buxton is going to wear?” He was approaching a subject of importance to the embryo sonnet, and was disposed to plume himself upon his tact.

“Miss *Brand*, you mean,” said Anne with her little laugh, which was sweet despite its sharpness, “don't circumlocute—or whatever the verb may be—with *me*. No: I do *not* know what that wise virgin will wear—pro-

bably an old petticoat of her mother's, or one of her aunt's *trousseau*-dresses turned inside out,—but I know that you will think it divine (that's indigestion, too) and that nobody else in the room will know what she has got on. *You* wouldn't, only you mean to sit up all night and put it into verse. Now take my advice; if you want to study dress with a view to poetry, turn your attention to Lady Shortlands: she's a creation in herself, only she's taken sixty years instead of six days. Come along—and let us interview the bandmaster! Oh, no such luck; here they come!”

Yes! there was the first arrival: before Mrs. Tomlinson had “got her dress over her head,” and while Buck had his hot face still under water. The inevitable lady from a great distance, who “thought she had better allow plenty of time;” rather tired already, with two daughters and a stranger niece (to whom the daughters looked appropriative over the

beauties of Ashbank, while she giggled and shrugged her shoulders, in return, as if she were acclimatised to dancing in much finer houses) and with a long-nosed boy, for all male kind, who, after dozing in the footman's place upon the box, looked scared and white, and was not set at his ease by Lord Shortlands' garter.

And then, on the inevitable first arrival, followed the inevitable mistake; Mrs. Buxton ('Miss Dalrymple-Robarts that was' as we know) coming down stairs to be taken for Mrs. Tomlinson, who was as yet an unfamiliar figure in the county.

Mrs. Buxton looked very well still at a ball: across the room you would almost have taken her for her daughter—that is until you saw her daughter. May wore a white frock all dotted with blush rosebuds and she looked as pretty and as wholesome as a blush rosebud herself. Lord Shortlands and the long-nosed boy—

whose surname was Grigg-Smith, and whose cross was that his acquaintance always dropped the 'Grigg'—were equally enchanted with her aspect, in juvenile and senile wise.

Then, just as the announcements were being made thick and fast and Mr. Tomlinson was beginning to be at his wits' end, Mrs. Tomlinson was hustled out of her room by her two body-maids and pushed downstairs. The skill of her domestic tyrants had been sorely tried, in fastening a monster poppy over the "thin place in her parting" to bear the weight of half a dozen priceless emerald and diamond flies and beetles, which clustered over it in Arcadian simplicity. She looked anxious; and the poppyful of jewelled field-bugs waggled in sympathy, as she rustled apologetically down.

"Crikey!" said the long-nosed boy to the niece, "look at her diamonds!"

She was immediately followed by Sir Edmund and his friend Dr. Burroughes, who

seemed to view the gathering not wholly from a scientific standpoint, but with a touch of young-man's interest.

More announcements! and then, first tremors of sound among the fiddles, for a stringed band had grouped itself in an alcove to supplement the brass band of the regiment which now hid the organ; and then—"cannon to right of them, cannon to left of them"—just as the three home officers came downstairs in their broad white waistcoats and with Mrs. Tomlinson's gardenias showing like immaculate favours on their big chests, the Colonel and the rest of their contingent arrived on their own coach from Portsmouth.

Then, never was such a tramp of entrance and flutter of introduction, or such an echo of shrill and noisy talking—"Ah! my dear," and "By Jove, old man!"—or such a congregating of shy girls—looking all pretty—and crowding of black-coated men—looking all alike

—in the dazzle, never was such a dividing of the sheep from the goats or such a tootooing of the band over all,—broken only by the butler's stentorian shout—heard, seen, foretold, or imagined at Ashbank since the days of its founding ; in the midst of all which, Eugenia came quietly down the great staircase, with old Lady Shortlands leaning heavily upon her arm.

It was not Eugenia's fault that she made her appearance so late : she had been dressed an hour ago ; her gown was not new and she had soon put it on : it was of some soft gauze that was neither grey nor green, with a satin body of the same neutral colour that fitted her as the sheath fits the flower. And on the shoulder, and low down upon the left side of the skirt, she had fastened some well-chosen fronds of the green and golden bracken. She wore no flowers that one could see, but she had not left the cabbage rosebud in her room. This simplicity was not studied : we know that she

forgot her box of trinkets at Shortlands Farm, and she did not wear flowers, only because she wanted to please Chatteris by having nothing but his ferns to adorn her. She had even allowed some slight change in the dressing of her hair—which by exhibiting its luxuriance with a wider sweep, surprisingly accentuated her beauty—and this was an unwonted concession for her. The clever Parfitt had been her *coiffeuse*, and the style made Eugenia hold her head rather higher than usual, being, to say the truth, a little constrained with it so. Although her dress was not of the newest mode, it was cut low and left her arms and shoulders bare—arms and shoulders beyond the power of any fashion to better,—and, with their rare whiteness against her water-coloured dress, with her beautiful brown leaves and her more beautiful brown hair and the most beautiful soul that looked out of her eyes, she was as fair a woman to behold as earth can show.

Lady Shortlands was used to her beauty—"She strips well," she had said to Parfitt, in her rough way; "indeed the creature is so well made, that it is a pity she should have to wear clothes at all!"—but Sir Edmund felt himself to tremble, as he gazed at her. It mattered *so much* to him how she looked, although he knew she must look 'best' always. He was like a man who is the first to perceive a rainbow. As she shone forth, after that pelting shower of nonsense and name-calling, he knew that he alone, as yet, saw truly this crystalline prism of celestial promise: Sir Edmund was quite satisfied with Eugenia's appearance. Chatteris—chiefly for the sonnet's sake—had hoped that she would be in dazzling white. 'Stars' were not green or grey. But he was contented when it occurred to him that he might represent her as a star reflected in dull water.

"Who is that young lady?" Dr. Burroughes asked him, at the moment; for he noticed the

impression that her entrance made on his friend Sir Edmund. He had been at the other end of the table to Eugenia at dinner, and she had not taken luncheon, occupied as she was.

"She is my cousin," said Chatteris, with pride, — "Miss Brand:—and she is Lady Shortlands' niece, but I am not related to Lady Shortlands."

Dr. Burroughes smiled. Lady Shortlands did not indeed look like one whom a poet would wish to have taken for his mother: "She is an incarnation of the world and the devil," Vane whispered to Anne Jefferies: "indeed it's only the absence of the flesh that saves her; if she weren't so thin, we should all have renounced her formally in our catechism."

Whether it was in contrast to Eugenia, or whether it was that Parfitt at last had overdone her pains, it was certain that Lady Shortlands' aspect was not prepossessing. She looked half as old again as she was—you would have

taken her for ninety,—and, while she professed herself in capital spirits, she moved in such a haphazard fashion that you would have said she was walking in her sleep.

“I feel like an owl,” she said, honestly, to Mrs. Tomlinson, “but I was determined to come down and enjoy myself: good Lord! how I used to love a ball!”—

She was evidently excited and weak, for her old eyes filled with foolish tears, and she trembled, as she leaned upon her jewelled stick, Eugenia standing by.

“I cared fifteen times as much as this creature does,” she said, “but I never go *out* now.”

“My dearest Lady Shortlands,” said Mrs. Tomlinson, delighted at the compliment implied in her ladyship’s appearance downstairs,—and delighted also to see that the Tomlinson diamonds made her ladyship’s old *parure* look as yellow as topaz,—“you are as fresh as one of

your own daisies.”—(Yes, indeed : Lady Shortlands’ wig was decked with field-daisies !)

Something in her hostess’ tone, or in Eugenia’s involuntary movement, made Lady Shortlands aware that her flowers were inappropriate, and she retorted with a comment on Mrs. Tomlinson’s monster poppy, which Eugenia managed should somehow pass unheard. It might have marred the harmony of this interchange of civilities.

But Lady Shortlands had not taken the trouble of coming downstairs for a passage of arms with Mrs. Tomlinson. “Where’s Sir Edmund Thingummy?” she asked impatiently, rejecting Mr. Tomlinson’s escort, “I want him to find me a place. Oh ! here you are. Now, set me down somewhere. Eugenia, go and find Vane ! Tell him that he must come and tell me all the people’s names and all their enormities. This county is a perfect hot-bed. Here Tomlinson, you take her!—knee better I hope?—I

want to speak to Sir Edmund. You need not hurry Vane, Eugenia; he seems well enough engaged with Miss Jefferies, and I have scarcely had Sir Edmund to myself at all. No ! don't dance : I don't wish you to dance at present."

Sir Edmund sat down attentively by Lady Shortlands, as the dance began. She had no sooner secured him there quite to herself, in uninterrupted possession, than she turned her drawn old face, under its daisies, to his, and looked hard into his kind brown eyes.

"Sir Edmund Trefusis," she said slowly, clasping her withered hands upon her stick, and forgetting his name no longer ; " I am going to say some very strange things to you, and I have no excuse for saying them at all, but that I am a spoilt woman with but one foible still ungratified."

The flippancy of her worldly manner had quite left her, for the moment. Sir Edmund did not doubt that what she had to say was

worldly—nor was he at a loss to guess its drift,—but he was impressed by her demeanour, and had determined, since his talk with Dr. Burroughes, to meet her, as far as he could. “I shall esteem myself honoured,” he answered gravely, “by any confidence you may repose in me.”

“What I have to say,” Lady Shortlands went on, as she acknowledged his attention by a courteous bend of the head, “can be said in a few words: I have done a good deal of mischief in my day, and I have had more luck than I perhaps deserve. I daresay you know my daughters: you know at any rate that one of them is the Duchess of Durham and the other Lady Cornwall. Now, as to the Duchess”

To Sir Edmund’s horror and distress, Lady Shortlands had quite lost the thread of the explanation she had so incisively begun, and her eyes looked troubled: . . . “What *was* it I

was going to say to you?" she asked, staring at him in a helpless way, and flushing deeply.

Sir Edmund bent his eyes downwards; by now he knew quite well what Lady Shortlands wanted to say to him, and he knew that she had only drifted into mentioning the Duchess. "You were going to tell me your wish;" he said, with more perception than accuracy.

"That was it:"—a look of intelligence, almost of cunning, came back suddenly to her face, but at the same time it was evident that she had forgotten Sir Edmund's presence:—"I want her to marry him," she said. "Her grandfather has behaved ill to my sister—we Carruthers do not forget a slight:—Eugenia must punish him: I want her to marry this ironmonger, this cripple; *he has sixty thousand a year.*"

Poor Sir Edmund! Great as was the pain these words inflicted on his sensitive heart,

it was as nothing to the keenness of his hope that Lady Shortlands might never realise that she had said these words to him. It was clear that either her sight or her memory was troubled in some desperate way. Perhaps she mistook him for Vane, perhaps she was not conscious that she spoke aloud. He made up his mind to bear with her, as he could. "You wish your niece to marry soon?" he said, trying to keep her thoughts in the same channel.

"In a couple of years," she answered, indirectly, recovering herself again and seeming unaware that she had wandered, "Eugenia Brand will be thirty. She ought to have been settled in life long ere this; both *my* girls were. My sister has nothing. She married for love, and she has been punished for being a fool. I did not marry for love—I did well. Yes; I did well, but I gave myself pain—I loved some one else. I wish

Eugenia to be married before she loves any one else. When we do love—we Carruthers—we love with our whole being, it is like a madness. Eugenia is a true Carruthers, like her mother rather than like me; but I was a true Carruthers a hundred years ago. Life changed me: I trusted that it would, when I took up my lot”—she paused and tapped her fingers on her stick—“I wish to get Eugenia safely settled. It has tarried with her, but, when it comes to her, it will be all her life. If she marries, Sir Edmund, she will love her husband. She is an honest woman;—she is more, she is a good woman;—and no other man will exist for her.”

Lady Shortlands paused, perplexed again: she was trying to remember what she had said to Sir Edmund, and what not; and the effort was dreadful to see. She repeated, as if looking for a clue: “If she does marry you, no other man will exist for her.” Then, taking

up the thread of what the words seemed to suggest, she went on with the complete consciousness that it was to Sir Edmund she was talking: "I see you are afraid she does not love you yet?"

It was a difficult question to answer, but Sir Edmund had foregathered what was coming, and, after all, it was the dear wish of his heart which she was approaching thus. Who shall blame him that he took the hand Lady Shortlands had stretched out to him, in her excitement, and whispered?—

"What I say is, how can she love me *ever*? I am insignificant, but just for this world's goods—and these she holds of small account I think—and I am ill."

"Take heart!" said the old lady,—her face radiant under the impression that she had achieved all this—"I may assure you, dear Sir Edmund, that my niece is not indifferent to you: 'I think him delightful' she said to

me this morning. I questioned her, and you know you may trust me for the truth of what she answered, if not for the actual words—and dear friend, I *wish it*; it is my great wish now. . . . Be assured that you shall have my good word,” she concluded, as if giving him a formal dismissal after receiving his proposal for Eugenia’s hand.

“You are very good,” said Sir Edmund, impelled to speak now, lest she should ever recall what she had said, and how she had elicited his speech. “You are very good, dear Lady Shortlands: you have induced me to confide to you the chief desire of my life. If there be any beauty or virtue in the world, Miss Brand is beautiful and virtuous; if there be any true love in the world, it is here in my heart.”

For all that she had wounded him, against her will, Sir Edmund felt that he could speak more freely to Lady Shortlands, as a tottering

wreck, than he could do when she was fenced about with her wonted artifice ; but the simple earnestness with which he now addressed her had the unexpected effect of recalling her to entire command over her faculties, for the moment.

“Softly, softly—fair and softly!” she said with an arch smile more pitiful to behold than her previous genuine emotion, “I do not think that I must listen yet, to this. Remember you have hardly seen my niece, remember too how many claims she has! Be patient, my good friend—I have surely said as much as you could hope, when I said—*What did I say? He has sixt*—no! not that. You have my good word with her, and I will not defer speaking to her beyond to-morrow. Can I say more than that at present? I think not. Indeed it is in great part for your mother’s sake that I say thus much. I knew Lady Jane slightly. See,

Eugenia has brought me Vane—a *charlatan*, but so amusing—not a word to-night, I beg, not a word! Ah! Vane, you will give me your arm, I want to get out of this whirl. So many ‘bare-backed steeds’—yes! I always say a roomful of women in evening dress is like a pork-butcher’s shop—why does that man look at me? Your doctor, Sir Edmund? Ah, well! many doctors have told me they cannot believe I am past sixty—past sixty? *he has sixty*—. . . . No! Your arm, Mr. Vane. Watching this waltz has made me quite giddy—Eugenia, where is my pocket? that woman has forgotten my salts—go upstairs for them, child, and bring them to me in the library: Sir Edmund will wait for you here.”

Lady Shortlands wandered along the corridor, leaning heavily upon Vane’s arm; while Sir Edmund and Eugenia stood for a moment, face to face, in a pause which to them was

none the less silence because of the noisy music. Then Eugenia turned and went upstairs for Lady Shortlands' scent-bottle, Sir Edmund standing still in the hall.

The grand staircase at Ashbank, magnificent as its effect was, had a disadvantage for use when the hall was filled with guests; because by keeping you entirely in their view it made you most conspicuous, if you went up or down. Had this occurred to Eugenia, she would have gone along the corridor, with her aunt, and up a back stairway; but, from her utter want of all self-consciousness, it did not occur to her, and as her room, we know, was straight upon the grand staircase, she had never used any other and was hardly acquainted with the windings of the big house. Sir Edmund watched her, as she went up, and his kind face was so troubled that she could not resist giving him a grateful glance, which added a fresh beauty to her features. Buck Jarvis,

panting from the waltz, in the hall, where he was taking his first spell of rest with a Hampshire hoyden great across country—whose face and whose dimpled elbows were about equally expressive—caught sight of her, at that moment, and became inattentive to his partner's charms.

He had seen Eugenia, now and again, in the course of the afternoon, but only for a moment at a time, and her manner had provoked him. He had determined that the evening should make good the ground he seemed to have lost during the day. Once or twice indeed Engenia had positively shunned him and a less thick-skinned man might have dreaded that he had given her offence, but Lieutenant Arthur John Jarvis could not conceive that he was disagreeable to any woman, and he was not so far afield as might have been expected when he concluded that her keeping away from him did not mean

aversion. He did not feel displeased that she had done so. But this was the first moment in which he felt that he wished her at least to keep away from others also. He realised with a sudden spin—for all this hero's knowledge came to him in shocks, which forced an entrance to a brain that never reasoned—that he was actively jealous over Eugenia, that—while he had not the least intention of letting her know it—he was madened that she should smile like that when her eyes were not meeting his. He wanted her, with that possessive want which craves every look. If this selfish passion of youth be any way akin to being in love, let us give him the benefit of wide terms, and say that when he saw her going upstairs and smiling down upon Sir Edmund, as he waited for her below, he began to be aware that he was in love with her himself.

He fidgetted and bit his thick short mou-

stache, his senses were sharpened and he even heard what was being said behind him by some fellow-officers—he was usually as obtuse as a wall.

“That’s the girl for me!” said one; “about as good as they make ’em, eh? Who is she?”

“Don’t know,” was the reply. “Nobody here seems able to introduce a fellow to her; looks like bespoken property.”

“Well! she’s not the sort that’s left on the shelf—who’s?”

“Sir Edmund Trefusis’—chap on the stairs—lucky devil!”

“Is that Trefusis? What, the man with the house in Grosvenor Square?”

“That’s him, my boy, you didn’t expect him to carry his house on his back like a snail, did you?”

“I thought Sir Edmund was a cripple.”

“Well, he don’t dance: he hasn’t got a

hump, you know: money-bags a little too heavy perhaps, that's about the size of it. By George, I wish *I* was crippled in that way."

"They look the cream of the lot here, any way. Safe to be settled."

Buck was indignant: he shifted his place, as he stood, and fidgetted more and more, until his dimpled partner thought that he was thirsting for the dance. "I am quite rested now," she said, but Buck literally did not hear her; and on looking up at him—for she was about five feet high—she found she was speaking to his blank ribbed shoulder, and she had to wait at least a minute before he put his arm round her waist again, with scant ceremony, and piloted her off without a word.

What a chopping sea it was when you were fairly launched! quick-sighted as Buck was, it took him all his wits to steer; for he was

not a graceful dancer, though he was so sound and strong. Swimmers and sailors, floaters and flounderers, on they all went. Lady Sophia and the fat Colonel, Crossley and May, Chatteris and a raw young female—a Scotch cousin. Distant-mannered ladies in long dresses, free and easy ladies in short ones—slim men with one shirt-stud, broad men with three—light hair and dark hair—dyed head and bald head—red face and pale face—couples pausing, couples starting—fresh arrivals and scudding wall-flowers, and through all the swirl and storm of it, ‘the dimples’ must be anchored safe in harbour.

When the haven was reached at last, and he bent his curly head to catch his partner’s breathless comment—for she had been very happy on his broad shoulder—he found that they were at the bottom of the great staircase, and that Eugenia was waiting to pass them, with Sir Edmund. How unruffled

and virginal she looked against poor blowsy 'dimples,' how white and cool her marble arm lay on Sir Edmund's sleeve! "Let us take this to Aunt Agatha at once," she was saying, and Buck did not know that she only spoke at all from nervousness, because she knew that he was near. Her voice sounded fresh and high.

"And you will keep those lancers for me," said Sir Edmund, "or do you want to dance them with a harlequin?"

"I had rather dance them with you than with any one;" she answered sincerely: she was afraid he was alluding again to his lameness. Just as she was speaking, the music stopped with a bang, so that Buck heard distinctly what she said, and he could not know that it would have been impossible for her to have said those words to him. He had soon handed the unfortunate 'dimples' over to her mother, who chanced to be sitting in

the protection of the balusters, and then—settling his chin over his stiff collar with something very like an oath, he walked up to Sir Edmund and Eugenia.

“Aren’t you going to dance?” he said at once, ignoring Sir Edmund’s presence.

“Oh yes,” she answered, not daring to look at him, and with a feeling that the blood had stopped about her heart. Then she held out to him a card that some one had given her; it was empty.

“Pleasure of the next waltz with you?” he said, in a manner meant to be fine, but in effect rather common.

“I will be back directly,” she said, but she did not stop. She left him the card while she went on with Sir Edmund to her aunt; but when she gave it to him his hand touched hers for an instant, and when she laid it on Sir Edmund’s arm again, he noticed that she trembled.

“Do not be alarmed about Lady Shortlands,” he said, attributing her agitation to concern : “Burroughes says that what she *must* have is quiet, and she will get that best in the library with Vane. But he says also that he is sure her state is critical, that there must be some brain-congestion, and he dreads lest any excitement should produce a sort of apoplectic seizure, which might result in paralysis : that is what we have to fear. Has she ever suffered in that way ?”

“I believe she has had occasional violent headaches,” said Eugenia : “I recollect her having one last year, and she may have had them frequently before we came to Shortlands.”

She was attending to Sir Edmund with an effort. She found herself longing to ask him, “what it was like to be in love ?” She was aware that her aunt’s health ought to be her first consideration, but she could not help it

that it was not; and she brought herself back to the subject with a wrench.

Nor did there seem, at the moment, to be any real grounds for alarm. They found Lady Shortlands comfortably seated in the ante-room of the library, which was less disarranged than the other rooms, having been left for the use of letter-writers who had occupied it till the stroke of the dressing-bell. Vane was there too, in rapt attendance upon her, listening to some story of old times which she could hardly tell for laughing, and which she was obliged to stop short altogether when Eugenia joined them.

“I can’t tell you the rest of it before the creature,” she said; “Eugenia, you lose a great deal of wit by being an old maid!”

Her manner had been consistently gentler to her niece, since their interview of the morning, but although she spoke kindly, her language made Sir Edmund feel embarrassed; and, as it

was evident that Lady Shortlands wanted nothing more than to see them together, he said, "Let us go into the library, if your waltz does not commence this instant—they are playing a polka now. It will be such a relief to escape those Chinese lanterns."

They turned into the vast silent room, which was separated from Lady Shortlands' audience-chamber by an oriental curtain. It was lit only by its own lamps and wore a studious look.

They were quite alone, the sound of the polka reaching them from afar off, mellowed by the distance and the heavy curtains that hung over the doors. Nor did Eugenia feel in the least that she was at a ball herself. It seemed to her as if she were assisting at a school-treat or a children's party. Although she had been made a little anxious by that anxiety of Sir Edmund's, on her aunt's behalf, which as yet she could hardly be said to share, she was otherwise in her usual mood. She had

changed her gown and passed through a crowd of dancers, that was all. Her breathing was still slow and even, and not a fern upon her dress was disarranged. She had got over the first moment of seeing Buck, which she had dreaded, and she was calm and impassive as a statue.

Not so Sir Edmund. He never went out to dances, and all this noise and movement was, in itself, something unusual and exciting for him. He had, moreover, just endured the painful scene with Lady Shortlands of which we know, after the day-long strain of his fears for her safety. To crown it all, he was under the impression that the evening was to be a crisis in his life; and he was in the presence of the woman whom he loved.

It was little wonder therefore that Sir Edmund was at his worst. His ordinary susceptibilities were greatly increased and he was deeply agitated. The two were at

quite opposite poles of feeling—extreme cool and extreme heat.

“I want to speak to you,” he said, at last.

“I hope,” Eugenia replied, noticing his distress, “that you will not trouble yourself too much, about Aunt Agatha. You will upset your own health.”

“It is not about Lady Shortlands that I wish to speak”—he said.

Eugenia waited to hear, but he did not go on directly with his sentence.

“Who gave you those ferns?” he began again rather impetuously.

Eugenia looked at him; she was not used to such questions, but there was a gravity in his expression that prevented her anger.

“James Chatteris,” she answered, in the tone that one might use to a feverish child.

“He is in love with you, too, I suppose,” he said, but his impatience dropped from him.

Had Eugenia been like other women she

would perhaps have asked Sir Edmund what he meant by the adverb. But she was too honest to do so and therefore she said nothing. She only sat still, hoping that he was not going to tell her that he loved her.

He went on. "They are very beautiful, which you know—and you are very beautiful, which I suppose you know also; every one who sees you tells you so. . . . Tell me if any one has ever told you so before?" He scarcely knew what he said, but her self-possession hurt him.

"No one," said Eugenia, slowly rather than coldly: she was pondering but not perplexed.

"If I could indeed be sure of that," he said. . . . "then I might dare"—

Eugenia moved away from him a little, as he bent closer: all the while it was herself, and not Sir Edmund that she blamed.

"How is it," she wondered, "that I do not feel more moved by what moves him so

deeply?" Indeed he seemed to have lost the power of speech and to be trying difficultly to articulate words which would not come to his lips.

Not knowing quite what she should do, she did what ought best to have helped him to speak; she took up a book from a table at her elbow, and turned its leaves abstractedly. It was not even an English book, and, had it not been already familiar to her, she would not have gleaned the slightest sense from its contents by looking into it so; but it was an odd volume of Molière, and she had chanced upon the fifth act of the "*Femmes savantes*." She had been used to recite some *tirades* from the comedy with her governess, abroad. It could not be said that she was reading, but the words before her eyes started to life in her memory.

"Ah! yes. Don't look at me," said Sir Edmund, "I want to speak but your

eyes have looked pity on me, from the first moment. Look at your book—but listen.”

He paused for an instant. Eugenia did not look at him, she looked at her book, and she read :

“ Si l'on aimait, Monsieur, par choix et par sagesse

“ Vous auriez tout mon cœur, et toute ma tendresse :

“ Mais on voit que l'amour se gouverne autrement,

“ Laissez moi, je vous prie, à mon aveuglement.”

It was exactly what she wanted to say to Sir Edmund: there was her answer written out before her, in super-excellent French verse. She had only to wait until he had spoken and then push the book towards him, and show him the passage. He would surely understand. Even the music was hushed now—his moment was come!

Just then the curtain was pushed roughly back, and Eugenia shut-to the book, with a surprised gesture, as Mr. Arthur John Jarvis swung into the room.

"This is our waltz," he said rudely, still quite ignoring Sir Edmund's presence. "I have been looking for you everywhere."

He stood holding back the curtain, as he spoke. Eugenia murmured a word of apology, half to him and half to Sir Edmund.

But Sir Edmund's chance was gone: she was fain to leave the room with her partner.

END OF VOL. I.







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